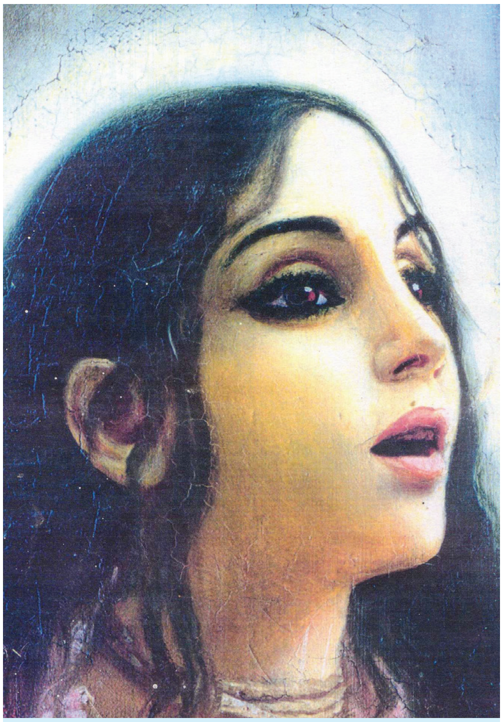

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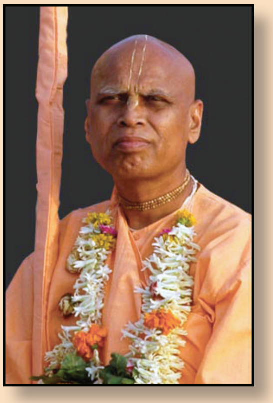
INTRODUCTION

This book is a compilation of the articles I have written for Back to Godhead magazine to date.



The inspiration to compile this book initially came from seeing a similar collection of articles in a small book by Ravindra Svarupa prabhu. Further, various devotees have encouraged me to collect the scattered articles into one place for easy reference. I am pleased to offer this book to those friends and followers.

My areas of service and devotional projects are reflected in these pages - Padayatra, Tirtha-Yatras (pilgrimages to holy places), Srila Prabhupada's Centennial Celebrations, and a few of the many festivals devotees like to attend. Although most of the articles are more than ten or twenty years old, they are still relevant today. Words that describe and glorify devotees and devotional service never age. They provide new inspiration again and again.

We are glad to present the second edition of Back To Home (BTG articles). The first edition was dull - lacking the punch and pizzazz of BTG magazine's layout, design, illustrations and glossy photos. Srila Prabhupada writes, "So conjointly make the appearance of BTG very nicely. The front cover page should be a nicely painted picture." In another letter Srila Prabhupada writes, "…We should not present a shabby thing." What we lacked in the previous edition, we are trying to make up in this one. We hope that you will like it.

Authors generally do not allow their work to be published without permission, however I would like to encourage readers to freely reproduce, distribute, and translate these articles.

Thanks to the Back to Godhead staff, especially Managing Editor, Nagaraja prabhu for his assistance with my articles and for supplying all the texts on short notice. Thanks to Dinanath Dasa for the layout and design of the first edition.

I would like to dedicate this book to Srila Prabhupada, who personally started the Back to Godhead magazine. He wrote many articles for it before writing his books and once said that Back to Godhead is fhe backbone of ISKCON. I am fortunate to have the opportunity to support Back to Godhead by submitting articles. I present this publication in the hope of pleasing Srila Prabhupada, who encouraged his disciples and followers to write extensively, just as he did.

Lokanath Swami

Sayani Ekadasi, 2008

Sri Radha-Krishna are together, the one supreme Absolute Truth.

Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, the combined incarnation of Radha-Krishna, inaugurated the chanting of Hare Krishna five hundred years ago.

His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, Founder-Acarya of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness.

BACK TO HOME

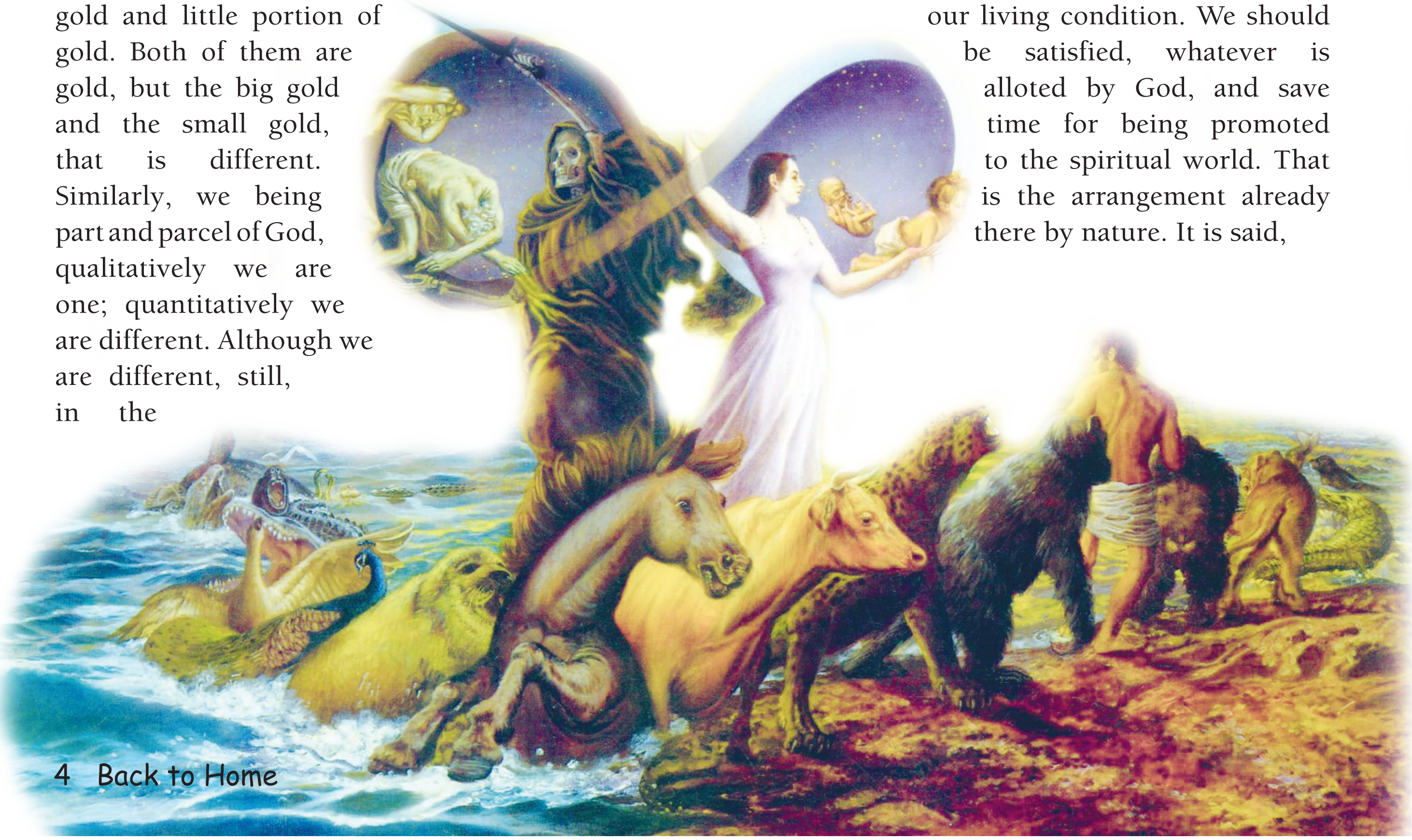
BACK TO GODHEAD

Srila Prabhupada at press conference in Chicago on July 9, 1975.

oṁ ajñāna-timirāndhasya jñānāñjana-śalākayā
cakṣur unmīlitaṁ yena tasmai śrī-gurave namaḥ

[I offer my respectful obeisances unto my spiritual master, who with the torchlight of knowledge has opened my eyes, which were blinded by the darkness of ignorance.]

Ladies and gentlemen, we are talking about the spiritual existence of the living being. By evolutionary process we come to the human form of life, and here we have got developed consciousness. We can decide now which way to go forward. There are different planetary system. That we can experience. We can see innumerable planets, upwards and downwards. So the upper planetary system is called Svargaloka, or the heavenly planets, and the middle planetary system is called Martyaloka or Bhurloka, in which we are staying at the present moment, and the down planetary system is called Pātālaloka or downwards. Downwards means fall down, upwards means getting promotion, and middle means we remain where we are now. That is... Indication is given in the Bhagavad-gītā, *ūrdhvaṁ gacchanti sattva-sthā: [Bg. 14.18]* “Those who are cultivating the modes of goodness, they are promoted to the higher planetary system.” And *madhye tiṣṭhanti rājasāḥ.* “Those who are passionate or under the modes of passion, they remain in the middle planetary system." And *jaghanya-guṇa-vṛtti-sthā adho gacchanti tāmasāḥ:* "And those (whose) character is very abominable, they go down." And beyond this, there is another nature. That is called spiritual nature, which is beyond this material universe. There, we understand, that is eternal. This material nature is not eternal. It is manifested or created, and again it is dissolved or annihilated. But beyond this material nature, there is another nature. There are also innumerable planets. They are known as Vaikuṇṭha planets or Vṛndāvana planets. That is the kingdom of God. If we transfer ourself to that eternal nature, then we won't have to come back to this material nature again. That is explained in the Bhagavad-gītā, *yad gatvā na nivartante tad dhāma paramaṁ mama [Bg. 15.6]*. Anyone who goes to that eternal nature, he hasn't got to come back again to this material nature. The material nature has been explained as *duḥkhālayam aśāśvatam [Bg. 8.15]*. Material nature is full of miserable condition. And the most miserable condition is explained as *janma-mṛtyu-jarā-vyādhi: [Bg. 13.9]* birth, death, old age and disease. So we living entities, we are eternal, part and parcel of God. God is eternal and we are also eternal. Just like gold and little portion of gold. Both of them are gold, but the big gold and the small gold, that is different. Similarly, we being part and parcel of God, qualitatively we are one; quantitatively we are different. Although we are different, still, in the spiritual world we can enjoy the same facilities in cooperation with God. We are trying to be happy in this material world. That is not possible. Because here there are four principles of miserable condition, which we cannot avoid. They are birth, death, old age and disease. In the spiritual world there is no such thing as birth, death, old age, and disease. Therefore in this life, in the human form of life, where we come after evolutionary process, 8,400,000 species of life, our consciousness being developed, we should decide now whether we shall remain within this material world or we shall go to the spiritual world where the life is eternal. There is no birth, death, old age and disease. So the Vedic civilization trains all human being how to go back to home, back to Godhead. That is Vedic civilization. We cannot be happy in this temporary material life. We are working very hard, but if we work a little only, not very hard, there is no need of working very hard. We have created a civilization that we have to work very hard. The Vedic civilization does not recommend that for sense gratification, you shall simply work very hard, day and night. This is not very good life. You should know what is the value of life, what is the aim of life. God has provided everything for our living condition. We should be satisfied, whatever is alloted by God, and save time for being promoted to the spiritual world. That is the arrangement already there by nature. It is said,



pūrṇam idam pūrṇam adaḥ pūrṇāt pūrṇam udacyate,
pūrṇasya pūrṇam ādāya pūrṇam evāvaśiṣyate
[Iso Invocation]

God is complete and His arrangement is also very complete. Everyone has his necessities of life completely. In the Vedas it is said that we are all living entities. God is also the chief living entity. The difference is that that one God, *eko yo bahūnāṁ vidadhāti kāmān,* He supplies the necessities of all other living entities. In the Christian world also, they believe God gives bread to everyone, and they go to the church, "O God, give us our daily bread." But higher philosophy is that we should not or we need not ask God for our bread. That is already there. We should approach God, how to love Him. That is our business. Otherwise, God is supplying food to the elephant who can eat forty kilogram at a time, or forty kg. And the ant eats only one grain of sugar. So God is supplying all of them. So there is no question of asking God to give us our food. It is already there. We should not waste our time to ask God for our sense gratification.

That arrangement is already there. We shall try to know God and try to love Him. That is the business of human form of life. If we are missing that occupational duty, how to learn how to love God... Our philosophy... Or this is the philosophy, that that is the first quality religious system which teaches how to love God. *Sa vai puṁsāṁ paro dharmo yato bhaktir adhokṣaje [SB 1.2.6].* And if we learn how to love God without any motive, nobody can check our love of God. And if we reach that platform, then we become actually happy. God is the supreme proprietor of everything, He is friend of everyone, and He is the enjoyer. We, being part and parcel of God, our duty is to serve God how He is pleased. Our... Just like part and parcel of our body, this finger, it is always engaged in serving the body according to the desire of the person. Similarly, we being part and parcel of God, our duty is to serve God as He wants service from us. This is perfection. If the finger or any part of my body cannot give service to the whole body, it is to be understood that the part is diseased. Similarly, when we do not give service to God, that is our material condition, or diseased condition, or miserable condition. And if we learn how to love God, how to serve Him, that is our healthy condition. So in the material world everyone is busy how to satisfy the senses. Nobody is interested to satisfy God. So in this condition of life we are misled, misled in this way, that we have got this human form of body, very nice body, and if we are misled, instead of giving service to the Lord, if we simply are engaged in the service of the senses, then we become subject to the karma or fruitive activities. That means we get different types of body. There are 8,400,000 different types of body. So if we do not properly use this human form of body, if we become subjected to sinful life, then we get a different type of body, very—animal life, tree's life, plant's life, aquatic's life, insect life. Or even we are promoted to the higher standard of life, as in higher planets the demigods, the four principles of material miseries, namely birth, death, old age and disease, we cannot avoid, either in the higher planetary or in the lower planetary system. But if we want eternal life of bliss and knowledge, then we must endeavor in this life how to go back to home, back to Godhead. And such persons who are endeavoring for this purpose, they are called first-class men. And they are called brāhmaṇas or the first-class men. So society must be divided into four classes: first-class, second-class, third-class, fourth-class. That is general. Those who are endeavoring for realizing God, they are first-class men. Those who are less intelligent—they are trying to rule over the material world—they are second-class men. And those who are engaged in producing food and cow protection, they are third-class. And those who are useless for any of these three occupational duties, they are called fourth-class. And those who are still lower than that, they are called fifth-class, sixth-class, like

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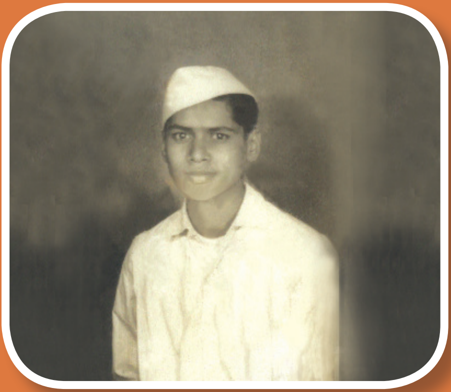
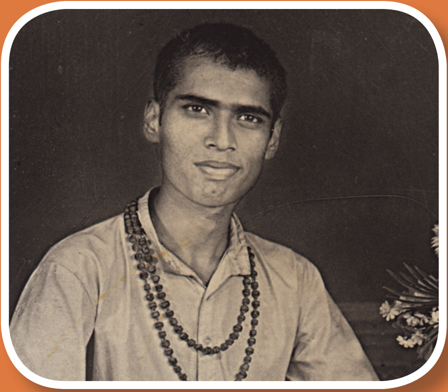
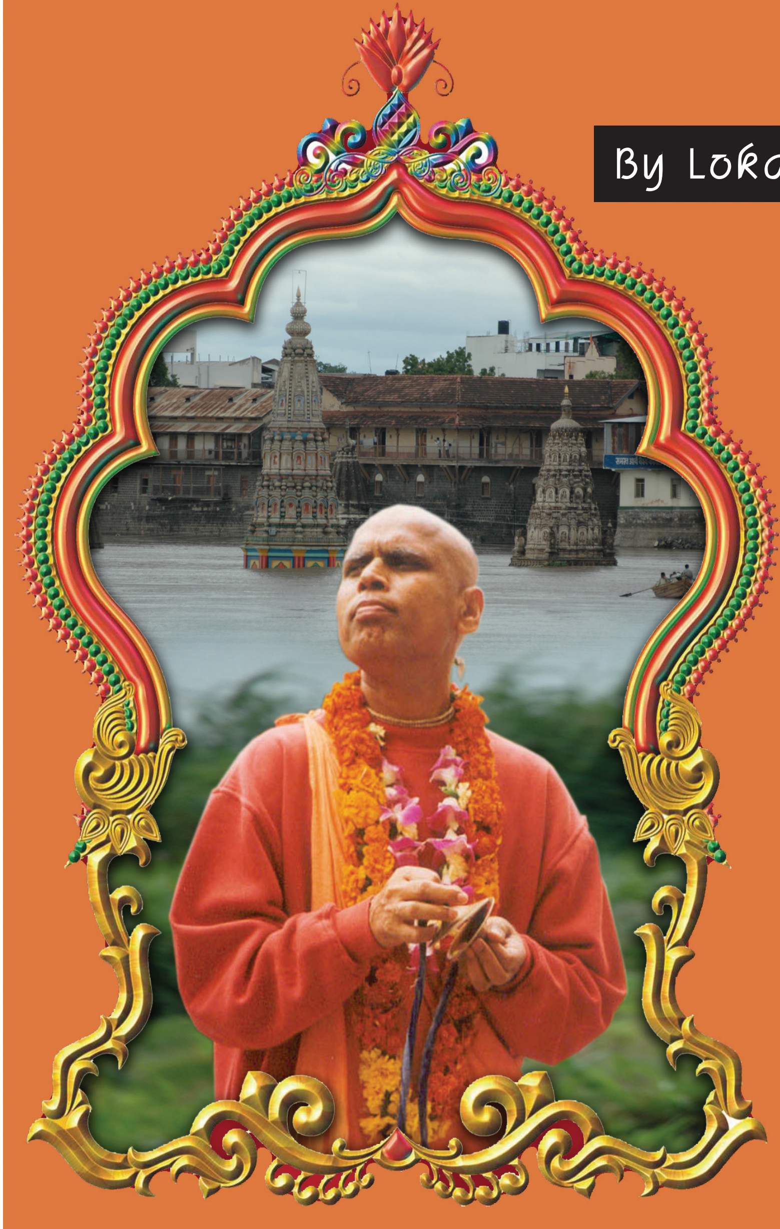




How I Came to

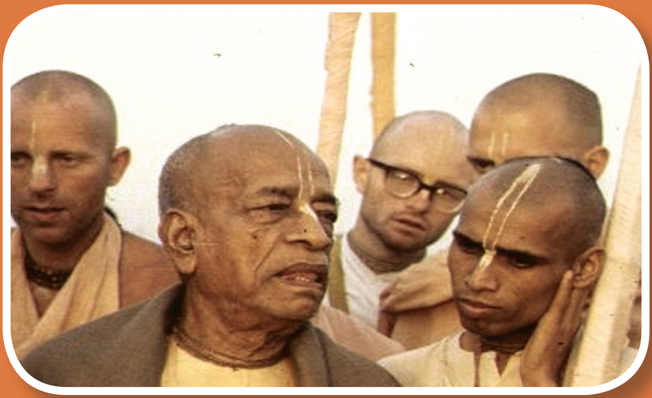


By Lokanath Swami

I was born in Aravade, a small village in the Indian state of Maharashtra that differs little from more than seven hundred thousand others in India. After I graduated from high school, my family sent me to Bombay to study chemistry in college. But my college career was not to be.

In the year 1971, in late March, something happened to prevent me from following the program my family had so carefully laid out for me. For the first time, His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda was touring India with his foreign disciples. They had arrived in Bombay just before I had, and now they were going to have a paṇḍāl (a spiritual festival) at Cross Maidan.

The devotees publicized the paṇḍāl very widely, in newspapers and on billboards. In the advertisements, Śrīla Prabhupāda's disciples were described as American, Canadian, European, African, and Japanese sādhus (saintly devotees). This was unprecedented. Previously, whenever the word sādhu had been applied to someone, it was understood that the person was Indian.



There could be no other consideration. But these advertisements were talking about sādhus from all over the world. This was indeed a novelty for every Bombayite, and it especially fascinated me.

Intrigued, I went to the Hare Krishna Festival, which was quite well organized. The Hare Kṛṣṇa sādhus were the biggest attraction for me. I appreciated their singing, dancing, walking, and talking. In fact, I liked everything about them, and I attended the function practically every evening. I would simply watch and listen. Though I knew English, I wasn't fluent, and speaking with foreigners was too difficult for me. I purchased a few magazines and a few booklets with the little money I had.

Śrīla Prabhupāda spoke every evening. He discussed many issues relating to Kṛṣṇa consciousness and made many points. But the point that had the greatest impact on me, and which attracted me to him and his society more than anything else, was the simple point that if you serve Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, you simultaneously serve everyone and everything else. Śrīla Prabhupāda gave the analogy of what happens when one waters a tree. Just by pouring water on the root of a tree, one automatically waters all the leaves, branches, fruits, and flowers on the tree.

Śrīla Prabhupāda had simplified my job. "Here is my chance," I thought. I had always wanted to serve others, and thus at different stages in my life I had contemplated becoming an engineer or a doctor or a lawyer. Whenever I thought of my future, I would think of how I could serve others. Yet although throughout all these years I had mainly thought of service, I didn't know where to begin, and I had practically no resources in my possession. But now Śrīla Prabhupāda had cleared my path by showing the easy way of serving the whole creation—through the simple medium of serving the Lord, the source of all that be. This idea greatly appealed to me.

As scheduled, the Hare Krishna Festival ended after eleven days, and everything went back to normal.

I continued going to college in Bombay. I shared a room with some people from my village, whom my family had asked to keep an eye on me. Once, several years before, I had left my studies and gone to join an āśrama in a town nearby my village. I had almost made it to the āśrama, but the unseen merciful hand of the Lord brought me back so that later I could join Śrīla Prabhupāda instead.

After this incident, my family had anticipated my going away somewhere, sometime, and that is why they asked the villagers to watch over me. But how much could they watch me? I had gone to the Hare Kṛṣṇa function practically every evening, and no one had noticed that. I would keep Hare Kṛṣṇa magazines and booklets inside my big fat chemistry books and read them for hours. My roommates would marvel at how seriously I was studying chemistry. They couldn't detect that instead of absorbing myself in analyzing chemical solutions, I was probing into the ultimate solution to the problems of life.

Whenever my roommates went out, I would bolt the door and, with my arms raised, chant Hare Kṛṣṇa and dance to my full satisfaction. Having seen the devotees chanting and dancing onstage at the festival, I was trying to imitate them. Thus, in hiding, I was following the process of Kṛṣṇa consciousness: chanting, dancing, and reading over and over again the few pieces of literature I had.

I knew that the Hare Kṛṣṇa devotees were living somewhere in Bombay, but after the function their small group had merged into the big city, and I was deprived of their association.

My parents tried everything in their power to dissuade me from returning to the Hare Krsna devotees. They even went to astrologers to learn some way to "cure" me.

ONE YEAR PASSED. Then, in March 1972, ISKCON organized another festival, this time at Juhu Beach. During the course of the year, the devotees had purchased some land at Juhu, and the function was going to be held right on their premises. Once again, advertisements appeared in the newspapers and in other media, and news of the festival reached me by the causeless mercy of the Lord. I had been waiting for this news, and I was extremely happy to receive it.

Naturally, I attended the programs. I would go long before they began, borrow books, and read them. During the chanting I would join in wholeheartedly. The foreign devotees, in Indian dhotīs and kurtās, and the Indian student, in imported trousers and shirt, would dance together.

Occasionally, during prasādam time, when I happened to be near the gate, the devotees would invite me to come and take prasādam with them. I was eager to observe their life closely, so I would take advantage of the opportunity and join them. They were all nice devotees. On top of that, they were all foreigners, and I was duly impressed.

A few days after the festival at Juhu ended, I sat down and composed an application for membership in ISKCON (the International Society for Krishna Consciousness). I had decided to join the devotees, and to join any organization, I thought, one needed to fill out an application. I addressed my application to the president of ISKCON, Bombay. I wrote that I agreed to follow the four regulative principles—no meat-eating, no intoxication, no illicit sex, and no gambling. I also stated that I liked their dazzling āratis, ecstatic kīrtanas, and sumptuous prasādam. (I had picked up all these terms from their publicity handouts.) I went to a typing institute and had the application typed out. ISKCON was an international society, so I thought everything had to be formalized and just right.

Then I went to the Hare Kṛṣṇa āśrama at Juhu and asked who the president was. It wasn't difficult to get to see him. His name was Girirāja dāsa. He went through my letter-application, and on the spot he accepted me and embraced me. Not only that: he welcomed me in and immediately introduced me to all the āśramites as a new devotee.

I quickly adjusted to my new lifestyle. I had a new home, a new uniform, new associates, a new program—almost everything was new to me. Nonetheless, I immediately embraced all of it and liked it. Although the devotees were mostly foreigners, I felt completely at home. I was determined to make this my life's commitment.

One week passed quickly. Then my elder brother arrived at the temple with one of my old roommates. Among the things I had left in my room was a handbill with the Hare Kṛṣṇa address at Juhu on it. That's how they'd found me. It was no big surprise to them that I'd joined the devotees. They had been expecting something like this for some time, and now all they had feared had come to pass.

My brother wanted me to visit my family, especially for the sake of my mother. If I wouldn't go she might die, he said. But he assured me my family had no objection to my returning after the visit. I had always respected my brother, and here he was practically begging me to return home, saying that it was a matter of life and death for my affectionate mother and that I could return soon. Finally, I asked permission from Girirāja and left, wearing my new uniform of dhotī and kurtā.

The unseen merciful hand of Lord Krishna helps a determined young student become one of Srila Prabhupad's first Indian diciples.

After I arrived in my village, people began saying that though I used to be such a nice boy, now something had gone wrong with me. The difference was that I was wearing a dhotī and kurtā, chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa, and avoiding the association of nondevotees. The townspeople considered all these things strange and abnormal.

My father requested me not to wear my new clothes and not to put on tilaka, even though he wore clothes similar to mine and occasionally wore tilaka himself. He was a devotee of Lord Viṭṭala, a form of Lord Viṣṇu, or Kṛṣṇa, and devotees of Lord Viṭṭala apply tilaka in a way similar to that of the Hare Kṛṣṇa devotees. On special occasions my father would put on his tilaka, but he didn't want me to imitate him, because he was worried about what people would think. (If such is the reaction of Indian parents, I can hardly imagine the reaction of parents of devotees in other lands).

Thus my parents tried everything in their power to dissuade me from returning to the Hare Kṛṣṇa devotees. They even went to astrologers to learn some way to "cure" me or to find out how long I would continue living this "strange type of life." They were really concerned.

More than a week passed, yet no plans were made for my return to the devotees, as per the original agreement between my brother and me. My parents kept telling me that some relative or other still had to come see me and that it wouldn't be proper for me to leave without meeting him. My family planned to enlist the relatives as agents to somehow or other talk me out of this sādhu business. My parents tried everything on me, but my mind was fixed on going back to the Hare Kṛṣṇa devotees.

One day I saw my sister shedding tears. When someone asked her what was wrong, she replied, "Just see how in our house all the other boys are nicely engaged in playing cards, but my brother Raghunātha isn't sitting with them." Such was the cause of her tears. She was feeling sorry that I wasn't playing cards with the other boys but was instead busy chanting the holy names of God on my beads.

When my family all realized I wouldn't give up the life I had embraced, they came up with the proposal that I could continue the life of a sādhu but that I should do it in our village. They promised to build a small temple so I could do my devotional practices there. I rejected this idea, too, however, because I wanted to associate with the devotees. There is no question of leading a spiritual life without proper association, without the association of devotees who are practicing Kṛṣṇa consciousness full-time. I didn't want to be just another bogus sādhu. India was already overcrowded and overburdened with them. I wanted to engage in the service of Kṛṣṇa in the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement. Śrīla Prabhupāda had already cleared my path. He had given me my life's mission, and I was fully satisfied once and for all with that.

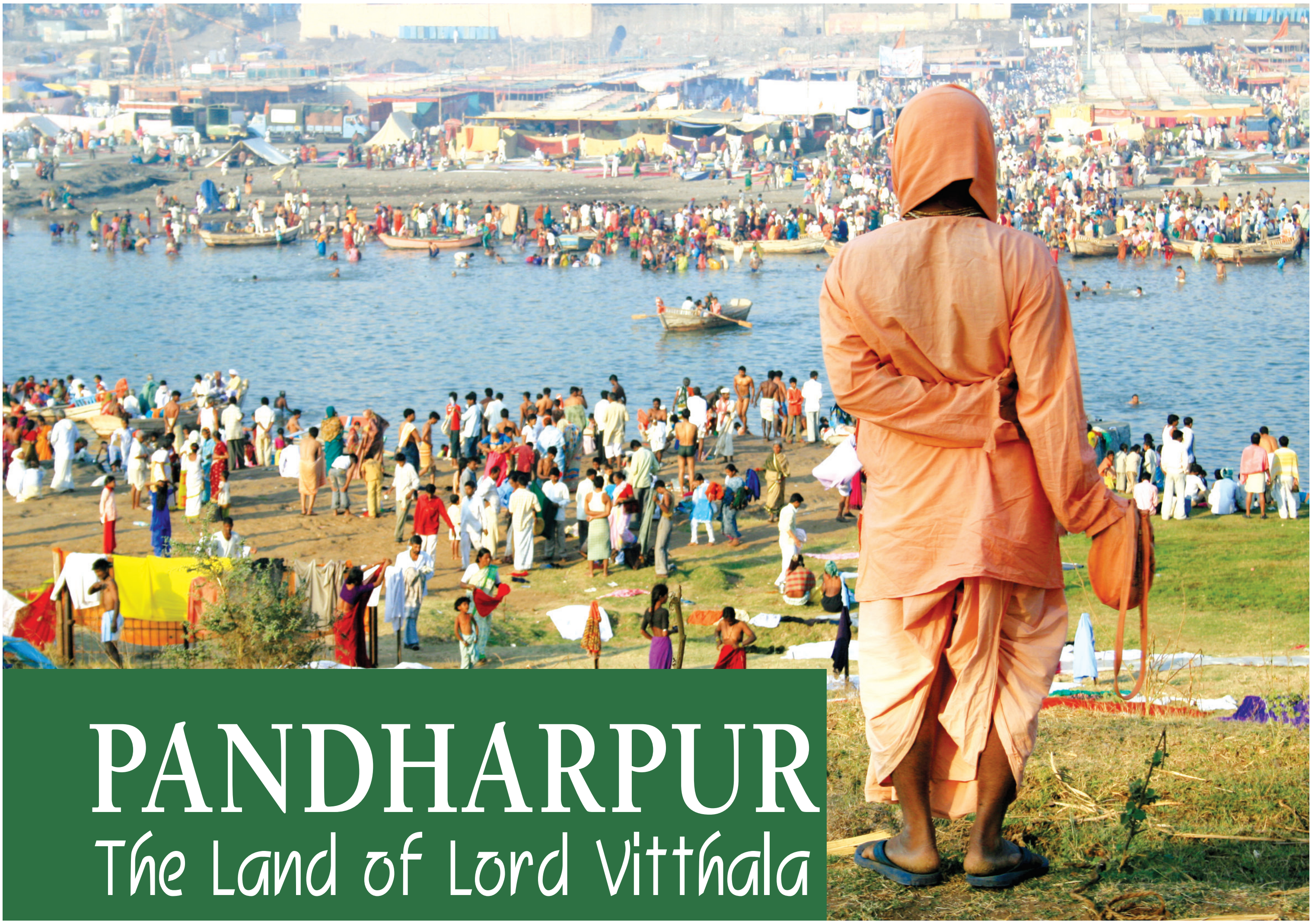
I had sold my heart to Śrīla Prabhupāda and Lord Kṛṣṇa. So, finally, my family accepted the inevitable. I returned to Bombay after about a month and moved back into the āśrama. Since I had stayed in my village quite a long time, I wasn't sure how Girirāja and the other devotees would react to my return. When they saw me, however, I was surprised to find myself most welcome, just as before—and they were surprised to see me back in their midst. Their experience had been that many Indian devotees had come and gone, promising to return soon, but hardly any had actually returned. Thus they were surprised and pleased to see me. By the causeless mercy of my spiritual master, His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda, and Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, my return to the devotees became possible.

POSTSCRIPT

Although it may appear that my joining ISKCON disrupted my family's life and caused a disturbance in my small village, these negative effects were only temporary. In the years since I joined ISKCON, I and many other devotees have often visited Aravade and taught the principles of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, and now my family—and my whole village—embrace ISKCON as a genuine religious movement. There are seven full-time devotees from there, my sister has enrolled her son into the ISKCON gurukula school in Vṛndāvana, and whenever I see my father he asks me for tilaka and proudly decorates his forehead with it. Also, my family and many other families in Aravade regularly chant Hare Kṛṣṇa on beads. All in all, my whole village loves the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement, and there is no disruption of any kind.

A unique design of ISKCON Aravade is upcoming temple project.

PLACES OF PILGRIMAGE



PANDHARPUR

The Land of Lord Vitthala

Throughout the provinces of India, the Supreme Lord is worshiped in various forms. In Andhra Pradesh He appears as Tirupati Bālajī, in Kerala as Guruvāyurappan, in Karnataka as the beautiful Uḍupī Kṛṣṇa, in Gujarat as Dvārakādhīśa and Raṇacora Rāya. And in Pandharpur, the spiritual capital of Maharashtra, the Lord is worshiped as Śrī Viṭṭhala. His devotees also fondly call Him Viṭhobha or Pandurāṅga.

Pandharpur Dhāma is located about four hundred kilometers southeast of Bombay. Some call it Bhū-vaikuṇṭha, "the spiritual world on earth." Others call it Dakṣiṇa Dvārakā, the Dvārakā of the South. The town is located on the western bank of the river Bhīma. Because of the way the river bends as it reaches Pandharpur, it is known there as the Candrabhāga ("crescent moon"). For the devotees of Viṭṭhala, this river is as holy as the Ganges.

Along the riverbank are fourteen ghāṭas, or bathing places. The main one is Mahā Dvāra Ghāṭa. The short street that links this ghāṭa to the eastern gate of the Viṭṭhala temple is lined with shops and stalls selling tulasī, flower garlands, coconuts, incense, and sweets, all to offer to the Lord.

TEMPLE AND DEITY WORSHIP

The black stone temple hosts the five-thousand-year-old self-manifested Deity of Lord Viṭṭhala. As one enters through the main door, one sees a deity of Śrī Gaṇeśa, to whom the Viṭṭhala devotees pray to remove all obstacles to their worship.

Across the courtyard, up a few steps, one enters the darśana-maṇḍapa, the hall where one can see the Lord. To proceed to the Deity room, visitors queue up through corridors built alongside the walls. Flanking the entrance of the Deity room are huge four-armed statues of Jaya and Vijaya, the doorkeepers of Vaikuṇṭha, the spiritual world.

The slightly smiling, blackish-complexioned Deity of Śrī Viṭṭhala is three and a half feet tall. He stands on a brick, His hands resting on His hips. This posture reflects His pastimes in Pandharpur.

The Padma Purāṇa and the Skanda Purāṇa briefly describe why the Lord journeyed to Pandharpur and why He stays there in this form.

Once Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī, Lord Kṛṣṇa's consort in the village of Vṛndāvana, visited Dvārakā, where Lord Kṛṣṇa lived as a king. At that time, Rukmiṇī Devī, Lord Kṛṣṇa's queen, noticed that Kṛṣṇa was dealing more intimately with Rādhārāṇī than He had ever done with her. Upset, she departed for the forest of Ḍiṇḍirvana, near Pandharpur.

Lord Kṛṣṇa followed Rukmiṇī to apologize, but His apology left her unmoved. So the Lord moved on to Pandharpur to visit one of His devotees, Bhakta Puṇḍarīka, now popularly known in Maharashtra as Puṇḍalīka.

When the Lord reached Puṇḍarīka's āśrama, Puṇḍarīka was serving his elderly parents. So Puṇḍarīka gave the Lord a seat of brick and asked the Lord to wait. The Lord did as told. He stood, lotus hands on His hips, waiting for Puṇḍarīka to return.

While He was waiting, Rukmiṇī, having forgotten her distress, came from Ḍiṇḍirvana and rejoined Him. Both of Them stayed in Pandharpur in Deity form. To this day the Lord stands on the same brick, but now He's waiting for all His devotees to come see Him.

While waiting, the Lord seems to tell the devotees, "Do not fear. For those who have surrendered unto Me, I have reduced the depth of the ocean of material suffering. See, it is only this deep."

He indicates the shallowness of the ocean by placing His hands on His hips.

Elegantly dressed in yellow and other colors, Lord Viṭṭhala wears around His neck a vaijayantī garland and tulasī, whose aroma permeates the darśana hall and the surrounding area. His right hand holds a lotus flower and His left a conchshell. On His chest He bears the mark of Bhṛgu's foot. His ears are decorated with shark-shaped earrings, and on His forehead beneath His crown is a broad mark of tilaka. The Lord's smile irresistibly enchants His devotees. Each pilgrim who approaches Him gets a glimpse of His peaceful smiling face and considers this the perfection of life.

The worship of Lord Viṭṭhala begins with the maṅgala-ārati ceremony at four o'clock in the morning. After ārati the Lord is offered pañcābhiṣeka, a bath with milk, yogurt, ghee, honey, and sugar water. At some point the bathing is interrupted so that the Lord may be fed butter mixed with sugar candy. A big lump of butter is literally put into His mouth. Then a short ārati is offered, and the bathing resumes. After the bath, the Lord is meticulously dressed and profusely garlanded. Finally, He is offered a mirror in which to view His appearance.

As a token of His merciful nature, Lord Viṭṭhala allows everyone to watch His bathing ceremony. After this the crowds, till then restrained along the walls of the darśana hall, are let into the sanctum sanctorum.

Daily, thousands of devoted pilgrims take darśana (seeing of the Lord). It is also the unique tradition in Pandharpur that everyone can go up to the altar and touch the lotus feet of the Deity. Some pilgrims even rest their heads upon His feet. But one has to move on quickly.

After taking darśana, pilgrims re-enter the darśana hall. Looking back, they get a last glimpse of the Lord's attractive form. In the buzzing atmosphere of the darśana hall they fall flat on the floor, offering obeisances. Then, holding each ear with the hand across from it, they turn about, springing up and down on the same spot, begging the Lord to forgive any offenses they may have committed at His lotus feet.

One of the pillars of the hall—the Garuḍa Stambha—represents Garuḍa, the eagle who serves as the carrier of Lord Viṣṇu. Pilgrims embrace the pillar, with the prayer that toward the end of life Garuḍa will carry them back to Vaikuṇṭha.

On the way out of the darśana hall, one sees hanging from the ceiling the famous eight prayers known as Pandurāṅgāṣṭakam, composed by the ācārya Śaṅkara during his visit to Pandharpur in the eighth century. Each verse glorifies the beauty, qualities, and devotees of the Lord and ends with the refrain para-brahma-liṅgaṁ bhaje pandurāṅgam, meaning "I worship the supreme spiritual form of Lord Pandurāṅga."

In the same temple compound, behind Lord Viṭṭhala's shrine, stands the shrine of Śrīmatī Rukmiṇī Devī, the Lord's beautiful consort. Darśana, offerings, and āratis go on all day, except for a short break in the afternoon when the Deities rest. After the last ārati, at eleven o'clock, the pūjārīs change the Lord's dress and chant special hymns asking Him to rest for the night.

Just as the Lord played the role of father and grandfather in Dvārakā, here too He reciprocates affectionately with His devotees. A famous painting depicts Him in a fatherly mood, carrying several devotees, some on His shoulders, some around His waist, and others holding His finger as they walk beside Him.

DEVOTEES OF LORD VITTHALA

Some illustrious devotees of Lord Viṭṭhala traveled widely throughout Maharashtra. Their preaching and their exemplary devotional mood left a permanent impression on the people. Their unanimous conclusive instruction to their followers was this: "Go on singing, go on dancing, and when you get to the lotus feet of the Lord, beg for love from Him." So nāma-saṅkīrtana, congregational chanting of the Lord's holy names, is very popular in Maharashtra.

In a letter dated July 30, 1977, Śrīla Prabhupāda encouraged me in this way: "The whole of India and specifically your Maharashtra are enthused with Krishna. Now you have to revive their Krishna consciousness. This is Tukarama's country, but now they are becoming bad politicians. So revive them by the process of the sankirtana movement."

Saint Tūkarāma was the most famous of all Maharashtrian saints. He lived during the seventeenth century, and over the last three hundred

Different outfits of Lord Vitthala and Rukmini years his devotional influence has been deeply felt by the local people. His poems, the 4,500 verses known as the Abhāṅgas, have become part of the public memory of Maharashtra. They are sung in every village and every home.

Tūkarāma preached throughout his life, exhorting his countrymen to take to the path of bhakti, devotional service. His language was so simple and down to earth that even the most simple villagers understood it completely. He is the main force behind the continuous kīrtanas and bhajanas performed at the many festivals in Pandharpur.

In his autobiography, Tūkarāma says he was initiated in a dream by Rāghava Caitanya Keśava Caitanya. Though not everyone agrees, Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas (such as the ISKCON devotees) understand this to mean Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu.

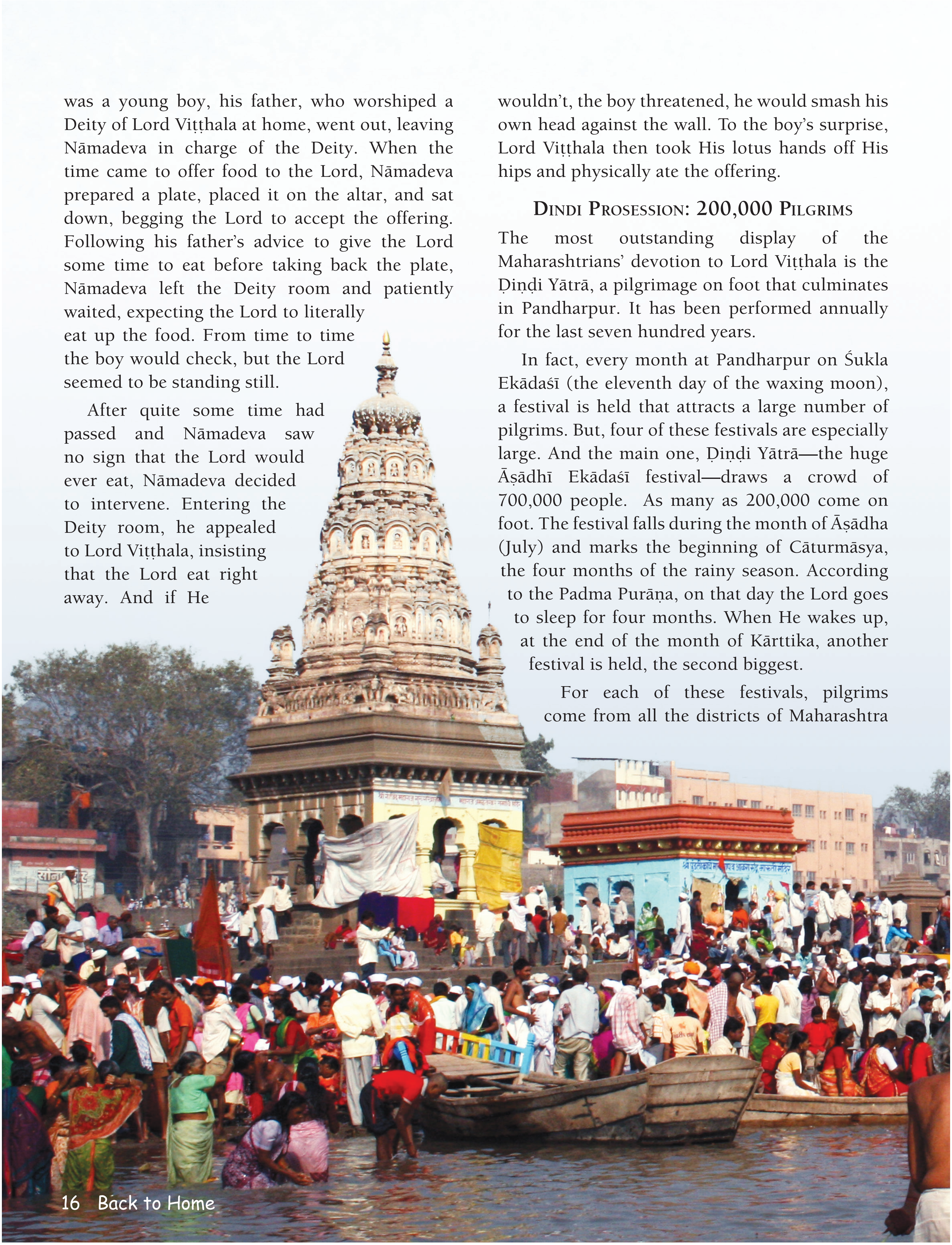
As Śrīla Prabhupāda comments (Caitanya-caritāṁṛta, Madhya 9.282, purport), “The saṅkīrtana party belonging to Tūkarāma is still very popular in Bombay. [It] exactly resembles the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava saṅkīrtana parties, for they chant the holy name with mṛdaṅga and karatālas.” They also wear neck beads and tilaka similar to those of the Gauḍīya tradition.

Tūkarāma Ācārya was a great devotee of Lord Viṭṭhala. As mentioned before, the Deity is self-manifested. That is, He spontaneously appeared, without being carved and installed. Expressing full faith in this Deity of Lord Viṭṭhala, Tūkarāma wrote, “If anyone says that this Deity was once installed, his mouth will be filled with worms.”

Saint Tūkarāma sometimes had to suffer humiliation and opposition from envious people, but he always stayed more humble than a blade of grass, thus changing the hearts of his enemies. The saint left for the spiritual world in his selfsame body while engaged in nāma saṅkīrtana, chanting of the holy names of the Lord, with the residents of his home village. The villagers attested they saw a spiritual airplane descend and saw Tūkarāma board the plane and leave for the spiritual sky.

Another exalted spiritual leader among Lord Viṭṭhala’s devotees was Jñāneśvara, who lived in the thirteenth century. At the age of sixteen, he translated the complete text of Bhagavad-gītā into simple Marathi, the language of Maharashtra. His work is known as Jñāneśvarī. He attained samādhi (passed away) at the age of twenty-one.

Also famous is the life of Saint Nāmadeva. Once when Nāmadeva



was a young boy, his father, who worshiped a Deity of Lord Viṭṭhala at home, went out, leaving Nāmadeva in charge of the Deity. When the time came to offer food to the Lord, Nāmadeva prepared a plate, placed it on the altar, and sat down, begging the Lord to accept the offering. Following his father's advice to give the Lord some time to eat before taking back the plate, Nāmadeva left the Deity room and patiently waited, expecting the Lord to literally eat up the food. From time to time the boy would check, but the Lord seemed to be standing still.

After quite some time had passed and Nāmadeva saw no sign that the Lord would ever eat, Nāmadeva decided to intervene. Entering the Deity room, he appealed to Lord Viṭṭhala, insisting that the Lord eat right away. And if He wouldn't, the boy threatened, he would smash his own head against the wall. To the boy's surprise, Lord Viṭṭhala then took His lotus hands off His hips and physically ate the offering.

DINDI PROSESSION: 200,000 PILGRIMS

The most outstanding display of the Maharashtrians' devotion to Lord Viṭṭhala is the Ḍiṇḍi Yātrā, a pilgrimage on foot that culminates in Pandharpur. It has been performed annually for the last seven hundred years.

In fact, every month at Pandharpur on Śukla Ekādaśī (the eleventh day of the waxing moon), a festival is held that attracts a large number of pilgrims. But, four of these festivals are especially large. And the main one, Ḍiṇḍi Yātrā—the huge Āṣādhī Ekādaśī festival—draws a crowd of 700,000 people. As many as 200,000 come on foot. The festival falls during the month of Āṣādha (July) and marks the beginning of Cāturmāsya, the four months of the rainy season. According to the Padma Purāṇa, on that day the Lord goes to sleep for four months. When He wakes up, at the end of the month of Kārttika, another festival is held, the second biggest.

For each of these festivals, pilgrims come from all the districts of Maharashtra and from other provinces of India like Gujarat, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh. The pilgrims follow in the footsteps of their many saints and spiritual leaders. Many of the pilgrims are vārkārīs.

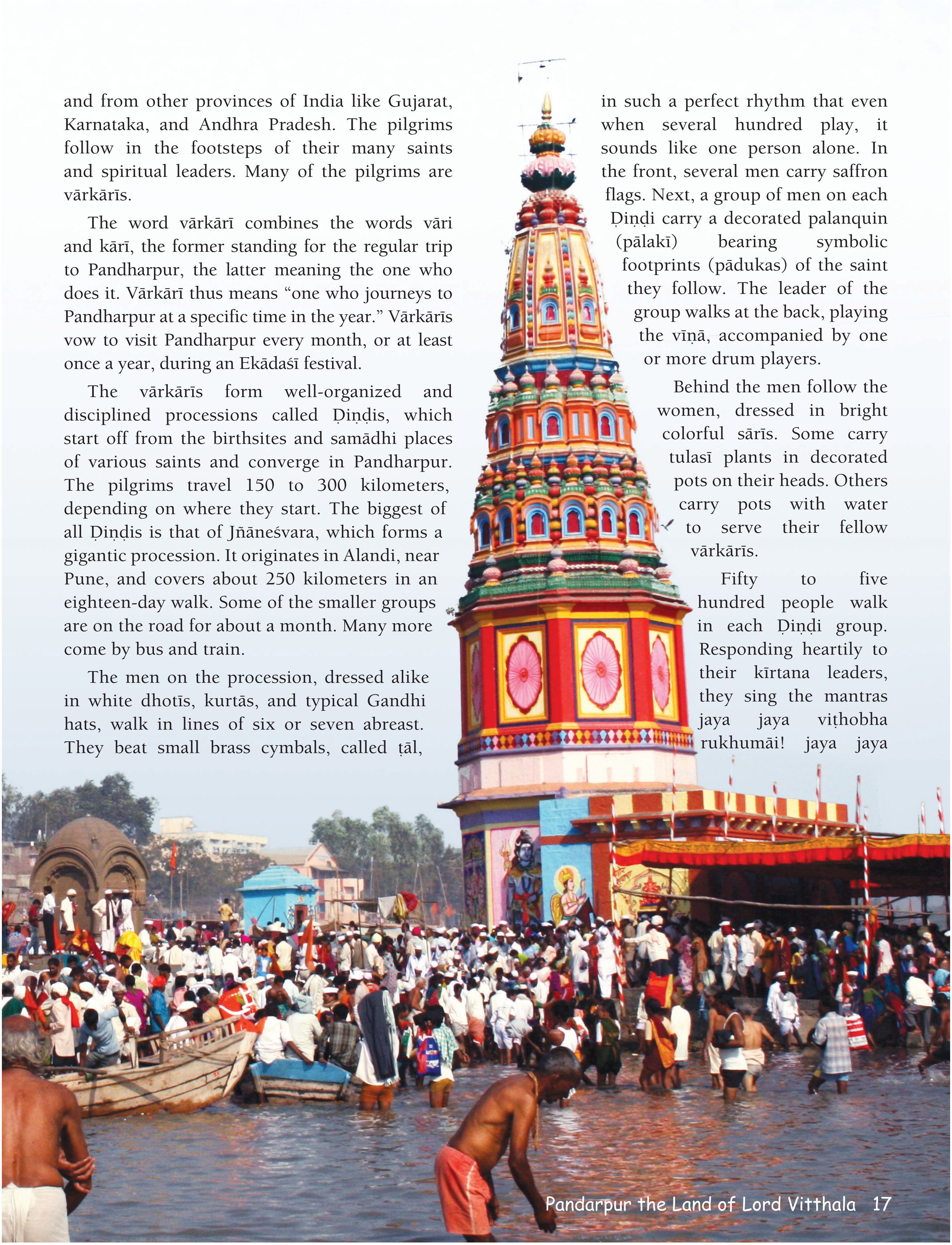
The word vārkārī combines the words vāri and kārī, the former standing for the regular trip to Pandharpur, the latter meaning the one who does it. Vārkārī thus means “one who journeys to Pandharpur at a specific time in the year.” Vārkārīs vow to visit Pandharpur every month, or at least once a year, during an Ekādaśī festival.

The vārkārīs form well-organized and disciplined processions called Ḍiṇḍis, which start off from the birthsites and samādhi places of various saints and converge in Pandharpur. The pilgrims travel 150 to 300 kilometers, depending on where they start. The biggest of all Ḍiṇḍis is that of Jñāneśvara, which forms a gigantic procession. It originates in Alandi, near Pune, and covers about 250 kilometers in an eighteen-day walk. Some of the smaller groups are on the road for about a month. Many more come by bus and train.

The men on the procession, dressed alike in white dhotīs, kurtās, and typical Gandhi hats, walk in lines of six or seven abreast. They beat small brass cymbals, called ṭāl, in such a perfect rhythm that even when several hundred play, it sounds like one person alone. In the front, several men carry saffron flags. Next, a group of men on each Ḍiṇḍi carry a decorated palanquin (pālakī) bearing symbolic footprints (pādukas) of the saint they follow. The leader of the group walks at the back, playing the vīṇā, accompanied by one or more drum players.

Behind the men follow the women, dressed in bright colorful sārīs. Some carry tulasī plants in decorated pots on their heads. Others carry pots with water to serve their fellow vārkārīs.

Fifty to five hundred people walk in each Ḍiṇḍi group. Responding heartily to their kīrtana leaders, they sing the mantras jaya jaya viṭhobha rukhumāi! jaya jaya



Pilgrims sing prayers on the way to lord Vitthala

viṭhobha rukumāi! and jaya jaya rāma kṛṣṇa hari, interspersed with lively songs glorifying Lord Viṭṭhala.

Day after day, undaunted by heat or rain, the pilgrims fill the air with tumultous chanting. Sometimes they dance and sometimes run, rushing ecstatically towards Pandharpur and their Lord. In the midst of this procession the words spoken by the Lord in the Padma Purāṇa come alive:

tatra tiṣṭhāmi nārada
yatra gāyanti mad-bhaktāḥ

“O Nārada, I stay where My devotees glorify Me.” Each Ḍiṇḍi is supported by vehicles,trucks and bullock carts,carrying crews ahead to cook and set up tents. When the pilgrims stop to rest and have their meals, each group finds its supporting crew just as calves recognize their mothers in the midst of a herd.

No one goes hungry on Ḍiṇḍi. The bigger groups cook in gigantic pots and distribute prasādam to anyone who sits in the line. The government supplies water for drinking and bathing.

The walkers reach their day’s destination by late afternoon. The convergence of pilgrims, and the symbolic presence of their saints, awakens the sleepy villages with intense religious fervor. In the evening, groups everywhere perform kīrtana, and crowds of thousands listen to various speakers, who spice their discourses with songs of the saints, to the tune of musical instruments. These speakers are like one-act players. They entertain and involve their audience, inspiring them to sing along.

On Ḍiṇḍi everything is done collectively. Crowds are cooking, crowds sitting in lines for prasādam, crowds sleeping side by side, crowds moving around, crowds queuing up for darśana in the temples along the way, crowds meeting the calls of nature in the fields.… You’re never alone on Ḍiṇḍi.

The dense crowd stretches many kilometers, people walking ahead or struggling in the back to keep up. Many people independently follow the Ḍiṇḍi, carrying their few belongings upon their heads. Some begin walking as soon as they get up, as early as 2 A.M. The main group starts at 6:30.

Walking about fifteen kilometers a day, the Ḍiṇḍis finally reach the outskirts of Pandharpur and unite at Wakhari, a small village three kilometers away. On the eve of the Āṣāḍha Ekādaśī, still more people join for the last leg of the pilgrimage. The three-kilometer stretch from Wakhari to the holy town of Pandharpur turns into a river of humanity flowing towards the ocean

of mercy at the Lord's lotus feet. In his writings, Bilvamaṅgala Ṭhākura warns travelers passing through Pandharpur, "Do not walk on the bank of the river Bhīma. A bluish-black person stands there, and even though His hands rest peacefully on His hips, He is expert at stealing the heart of anyone who sees Him."

It seems that the vārkārīs carefully ignore Bilvamaṅgala Ṭhākura's advice. In fact, they are especially eager to meet that person.

Upon reaching Pandharpur, the pilgrims take a dip in the Candrabhāga River. Then, carrying the palanquins on their shoulders, they perform nagara-pradakṣiṇā, walking a circle around the holy town. The circle complete, they queue up all night at the temple to catch a glimpse of Lord Viṭṭhala on the Ekādaśī day. In the heavy rush, each will get to see the Lord for perhaps a few seconds. For them it will be enough: their souls will be satisfied, and it will have been worth the trouble.

PILGRIMS FROM ABROAD

Amongst the multitude of pilgrims on Ḍiṇḍi Yātrā, a pilgimage on foot that culminates in Pandharpur, there are always a few visitors from abroad, their eyes and ears wide open in amazement.

In 1989, some fifty fortunate ISKCON devotees, about a dozen of them foreigners, took

Devotees chanting jaya jaya Vithobha Rukumasi part in the Ḍiṇḍi with Padayātrā India, our own traveling party. All of us were treated nicely, without discrimination. Our saffron-robed party sparkled amidst the white dhotīs and kurtās of the vārkārīs (pilgrims to Pandharpur). The Viṭṭhala devotees would greet us Kṛṣṇa devotees with a friendly "Hare Kṛṣṇa."

Many people were impressed by our strict following of the Vaiṣṇava principles. The vārkārīs, most of them householders, are devoted and very faithful to Lord Viṭṭhala, but for lack of a living example to follow they sometimes still have a few attachments, such as tea, onions, and bīḍīs (leaf-rolled cigarettes). So they saw our devotees as real renunciants. Vārkārīs would often dive to touch our devotees' feet.

A constant flow of pious souls would encircle the Padayātrā Deity cart, eager for darśana, thrusting hands towards the pūjārī for mahā-prasāda and caraṇāmṛta, the water from the bathing of the Deity. But it wasn't rare to see a man wearing tilaka take off his shoes to receive the sacred caraṇ-āmṛta with his right hand while holding a bīḍī in his left.

Dr. Thomas J. Hopkins, chairman of the Department of Religious Studies at Franklin and Marshall College, in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, relates his experience of Ḍiṇḍi: "Pandharpur is pervaded by much of the same quality of genuine devotion to Kṛṣṇa that you find in a place like Vṛndāvana. There's a simple, popular movement there [Ḍiṇḍi] which draws people from a very wide range of backgrounds—college professors, professional people, peasants from farms—all brought together in a conscious community of believers. You really see the power of devotion break through all these ordinary barriers of caste and education and bring people together for worship.

"When I was there in 1969 during the festival period … both of us Westerners there at that festival were welcomed with open arms. There was no question of separation or difference due to caste or nationality.… The association of genuine devotees can exert a powerful effect upon one's consciousness. I can still not just remember but almost hear the singing of certain devotees at Pandharpur."

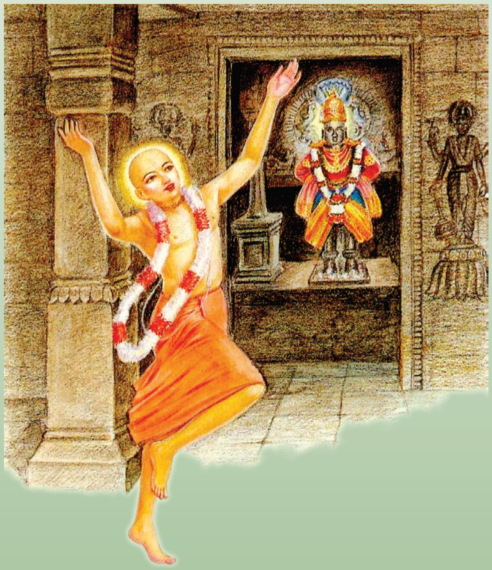
CAITANYA MAHAPRABHU'S VISIT

Lord caitanya visited Pandharpur while on a journey through South India, apparently to search for His sannyāsī brother, Śaṅkarāraṇya, formerly known as Viśvarūpa.

After traveling down the east coast of India through the province of Tamil Nadu and up the west coast through Kerala and Karnataka, Caitanya Mahāprabhu entered Maharashtra. As stated in the Caitanya-caritāmṛta (Madhya 9.282–283), the Lord went to Pandharpur, where He happily saw the Deity of Lord Viṭṭhala and chanted and danced.

In Pandharpur Lord Caitanya met Śrī Raṅga Purī, a Godbrother of His spiritual master, Īśvara Purī. They talked about Lord Kṛṣṇa continuously for five to seven days.

Śrī Raṅga Purī recalled that he had once been to Navadvīpa, Lord Caitanya's birthplace, where he had visited the house of a brāhmaṇa named



Jagannātha Miśra. Śrī Raṅga Purī remembered the taste of a curry cooked from banana flowers by Jagannātha Miśra's wife. Jagannātha Miśra's eldest son had accepted the renounced order. Śrī Raṅga Purī had later learned, he said, that this son had passed away in Pandharpur.

Jagannātha Miśra, Lord Caitanya then revealed, had been His father, and the son who had passed away had been His brother.

Lord Caitanya stayed four more days in Pandharpur, before moving on. During His tour of South India, Lord Caitanya was constantly on the move, but He stayed in Pandharpur for about eleven days. His pastimes there, and those of His brother, establish yet another link between Pandharpur and the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition followed by the present-day Hare Kṛṣṇa devotees.

ISKCON at Pandharpur

Across THE Candrabhāga River, right on the bank, rests a small and peaceful Hare Kṛṣṇa āśrama, started by ISKCON devotees from Maharashtra in the early 1980's. They cultivate the land, keep cows, and during Ekādaśī festivals help serve the pilgrims. The devotees supply Śrīla Prabhupāda's Marathi Bhagavad-gītā, always popular.

The ISKCON āśrama served as host for our Padayātrā's first visit to Pandharpur, in December of 1984. During that visit, the priests of the Viṭṭhala temple warmly welcomed us and gave us the special privilege of bathing the Deity of Lord Viṭṭhala.

We were on a pilgrimage of our own to celebrate the appearance of Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu five centuries before. So we installed symbolic footprints of Lord Caitanya under a huge pipal tree on the ISKCON property, commemorating Lord Caitanya's visit to Pandharpur.

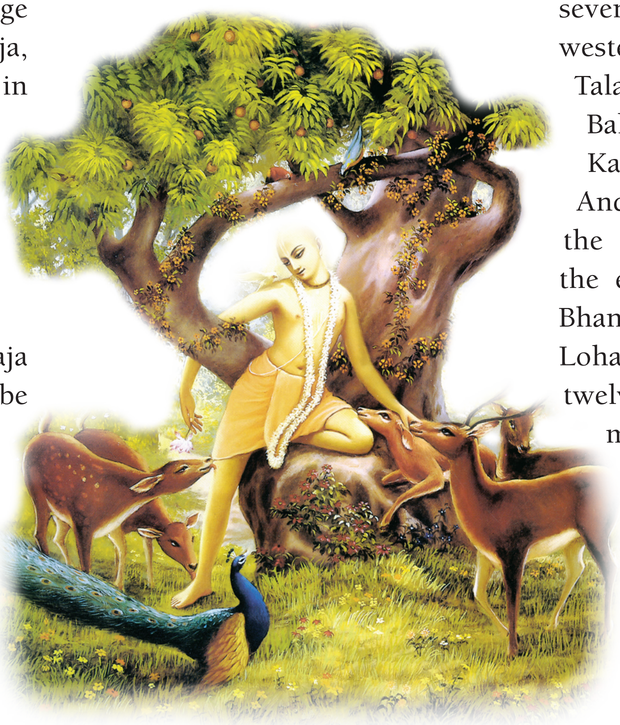
ISKCON at Pandharpur

Sri Sri Radha Pandharinath

THIRTY DAYS IN KRISHNA'S LAND

The vraja Maṇḍala Parikramā is a walking pilgrimage throughout the land of Vraja, or Mathura, the district in North India where Lord Kṛṣṇa appeared five thousand years ago. Devotees walk the entire parikramā path, stopping at the places where Kṛṣṇa performed His pastimes. Vraja Maṇḍala Parikramā can be considered pāda-sevanam (serving Śrī Kṛṣṇa's lotus feet), one of the nine forms of devotional service.

Within Mathura, the Yamuna River and the twelve forests of Vṛndāvana form the stage for the divine play of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa's transcendental pastimes. Lord Kṛṣṇa presides over the seven forests on the Yamuna's western bank: Madhuvan, Talavan, Kumudavan, Bahulavan, Vṛndāvana, Kamyavan, Khadiravan. And Lord Balarāma rules the five forests decorating the eastern bank: Bhadravan, Bhandiravan, Bilvavan, Lohavan, and Mahavan. These twelve beautiful forests are the most important places of pilgrimage.



Śrī Caitanya Mahaprabhu, the Supreme Personality of Godhead Himself, set an example by touring

Vṛndāvana's twelve forests. While Lord Caitanya was performing the parikramā, the residents said:

> Who says He is a sannyāsī? He is Kṛṣṇa Himself appearing in this dress and form. Just see the proof. Different birds are all coming for His darśana [audience]. The cuckoos and parrots are happily addressing Him as Kṛṣṇa, and the peacocks are dancing in jubilation. See the wonderful blooming of the trees! O brother, just see the creepers showering flowers on this person, who is disguised as a sannyāsī. The deer are coming near Him and staring undivertedly towards His face. All the cows are coming running from all sides with raised tails, and they also look at His face. By the tears of ecstasy falling from the eyes of these creatures, we can understand that they are meeting Him after a long period of time.
>
> —*From the book Mathurā Maṇḍala Parikramā, based on Śrīla Narahari Cakravartī Ṭhākura's Bhakti Ratnākara*

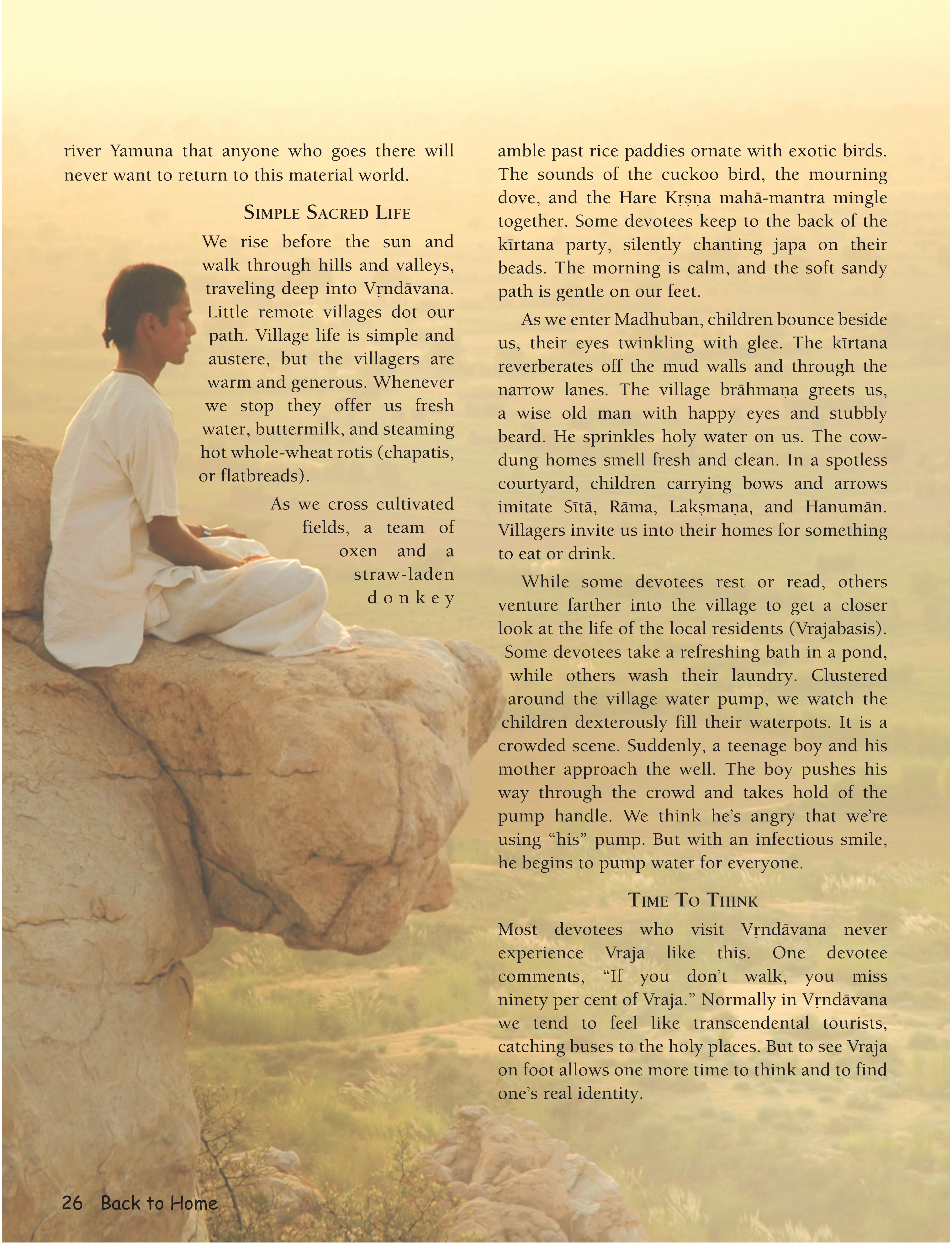
The six Gosvāmīs and other associates of Lord Caitanya, as well as thousands of faithful in His line (Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas) throughout the centuries, have enthusiastically executed Vraja Maṇḍala Parikramā, a blissful form of devotional service. In October 1932, Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī, the spiritual master of His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda, led a group of more than a thousand disciples and other pilgrims on a month-long parikramā of the sacred places of Vṛndāvana. It was one of

the largest parikramās ever seen in Vṛndāvana. Śrīla Prabhupāda, then a married man living in Allahabad, traveled to Vṛndāvana intent on seeing Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī and hoping to join the parikramā party.

"I was not initiated at the time of the parikramā," Śrīla Prabhupāda recalled, "but I had very good admiration for these Gaudiya Math people. They were very kind to me, so I thought, 'What are these people doing in this parikramā? Let me go.' So I met them at Kosi."

Today dozens of groups of devotees from different parts of India still perform the padayātrā (walking festival) of Vraja Maṇḍala to see and hear about the places of Kṛṣṇa's pastimes. Every year during the month of Kārtika (Oct.–Nov.), Kṛṣṇa devotees taste the ecstasy of circumambulating Śrī Vṛndāvana Dhāma. Besides being a wonderful way to see and serve Śrī Kṛṣṇa's transcendental land, Vraja Maṇḍala Parikramā purifies one's consciousness.

Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī has described Vraja: "I remember the Lord standing by the banks of the Yamuna River, so beautiful amid the kadamba trees, where many birds are chirping in the gardens. And these impressions are always giving me transcendental realization of beauty and bliss." Even non-devotees can feel the bliss described by Rūpa Gosvāmī. The places in the eighty-four-square-mile district of Mathura and Vṛndāvana are so beautifully situated on the banks of the



river Yamuna that anyone who goes there will never want to return to this material world.

SIMPLE SACRED LIFE

We rise before the sun and walk through hills and valleys, traveling deep into Vṛndāvana. Little remote villages dot our path. Village life is simple and austere, but the villagers are warm and generous. Whenever we stop they offer us fresh water, buttermilk, and steaming hot whole-wheat rotis (chapatis, or flatbreads).

As we cross cultivated fields, a team of oxen and a straw-laden donkey amble past rice paddies ornate with exotic birds. The sounds of the cuckoo bird, the mourning dove, and the Hare Kṛṣṇa mahā-mantra mingle together. Some devotees keep to the back of the kīrtana party, silently chanting japa on their beads. The morning is calm, and the soft sandy path is gentle on our feet.

As we enter Madhuban, children bounce beside us, their eyes twinkling with glee. The kīrtana reverberates off the mud walls and through the narrow lanes. The village brāhmaṇa greets us, a wise old man with happy eyes and stubbly beard. He sprinkles holy water on us. The cow-dung homes smell fresh and clean. In a spotless courtyard, children carrying bows and arrows imitate Sītā, Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa, and Hanumān. Villagers invite us into their homes for something to eat or drink.

While some devotees rest or read, others venture farther into the village to get a closer look at the life of the local residents (Vrajabasis). Some devotees take a refreshing bath in a pond, while others wash their laundry. Clustered around the village water pump, we watch the children dexterously fill their waterpots. It is a crowded scene. Suddenly, a teenage boy and his mother approach the well. The boy pushes his way through the crowd and takes hold of the pump handle. We think he's angry that we're using "his" pump. But with an infectious smile, he begins to pump water for everyone.

TIME TO THINK

Most devotees who visit Vṛndāvana never experience Vraja like this. One devotee comments, "If you don't walk, you miss ninety per cent of Vraja." Normally in Vṛndāvana we tend to feel like transcendental tourists, catching buses to the holy places. But to see Vraja on foot allows one more time to think and to find one's real identity.

We visit Talavan forest, where Lord Balarāma killed Dhenukāsura. In the village of Etarsi, we visit the temple where breathtakingly beautiful deities of Balarāma and His eternal consort, Revatī, reside. A tala tree stands just inside the temple compound.

It is traditional to perform parikramā barefoot, and we try our best to follow the example of the saintly persons who have walked before us. Sometimes small thorns prick our feet, and we try to remember the austerities of Dhruva Mahārāja, compared to which ours are insignificant. Vraja Maṇḍala Parikramā strips one of all pretensions. We may have a big position in this world, but the thorns don't discriminate.

Before it gets too hot, we climb to the summit of Kedarnath Mountain. A stone staircase etched into the mountainside leads us up 270 steps to a temple of Lord Śiva. The temple is a natural cave, its overhang resembling the hoods of a multi-hooded snake. From atop the hill, we view the unique panoramic scene of the Vraja plains, stretched for about twenty kilometers all around us. As our gaze wanders out over the expanse of sacred land, we meditate on and hear about Kṛṣṇa's Vṛndāvana pastimes.

KRISHNA'S FOOTPRINTS

In the early afternoon we take to tarred road on a seemingly endless walk to Caran Pahari. Here, Kṛṣṇa would play His flute and melt the rocks with a touching melody. The rocks captured Kṛṣṇa's footprints. We eagerly rush to see them and smear on our heads the dust from these fivethousand-year-old footprints. We pray that our stonelike hearts may also melt in response to Kṛṣṇa's call.

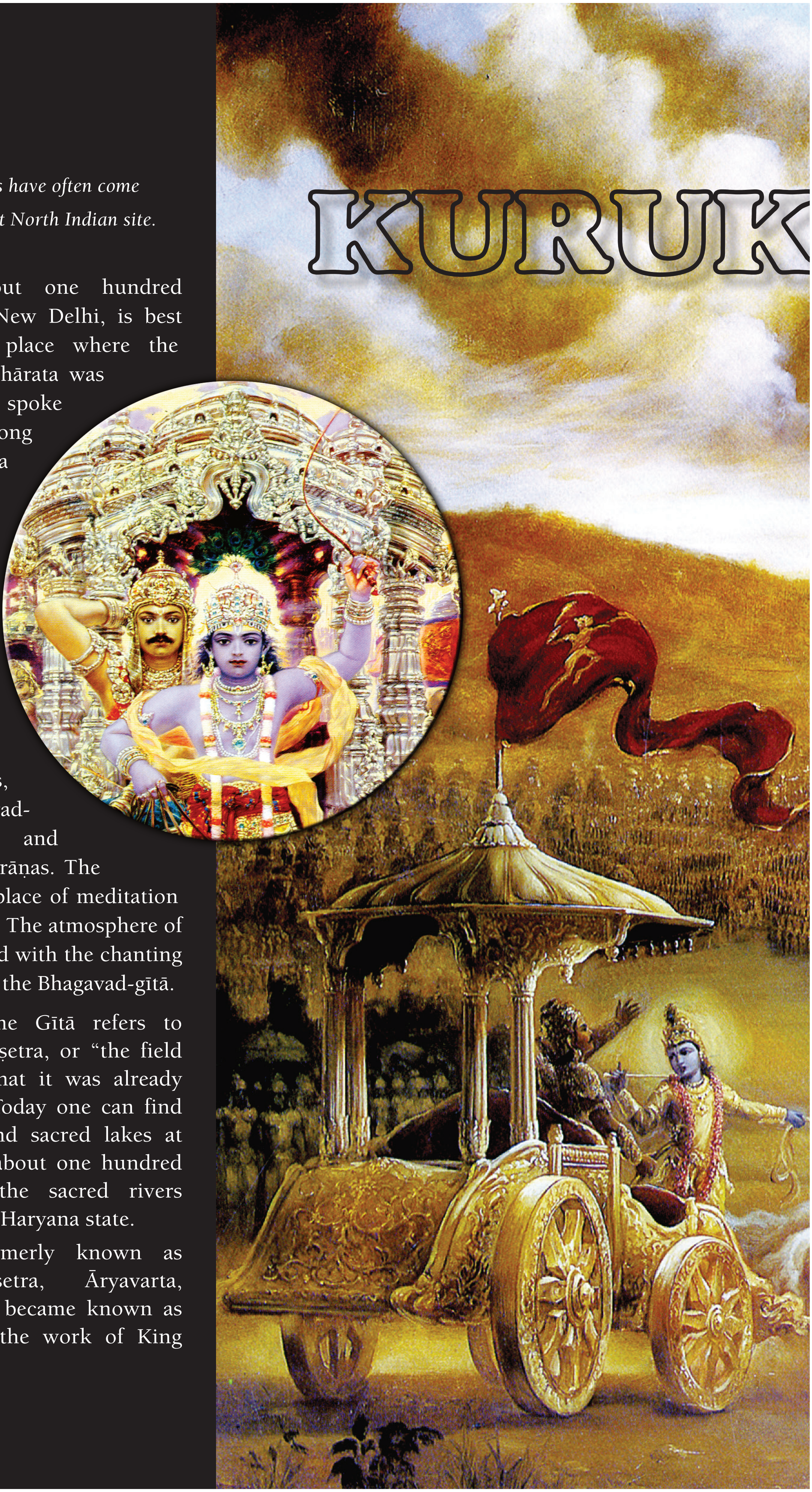
We bathe in ponds where Kṛṣṇa played His water sports and submerge ourselves in the Yamuna River, where He performed unlimited pastimes. We feel like we are following Him around Vraja. If we stay on His trail, we'll turn the last corner of material attachment and catch up with Him. On parikramā we get a glimpse of the mood of separation from Kṛṣṇa as we wander through the forests of Vṛndāvana. Parikramā instills appreciation for devotional sentiments even within the heart of a neophyte devotee.

Finally we see the city of Mathura rise from the plains of Vraja like an ancient medieval kingdom. We've made it! One hundred sixty-eight miles in thirty days. A tremendous feeling of accomplishment and exhilaration rises in our hearts. Our Vraja Maṇḍala Parikramā is almost over, and our walk on the path back to Godhead has shortened.

A tall bridge leads us across the Yamuna back to Mathura. The kīrtana resounds through the crowded back streets of the city. We take our final bath at Vishram Ghat. Vraja Maṇḍala Parikramā is a perfect test for one's spiritual health. In the pure atmosphere of the Lord's land, our impurities stand out clearly, like black spots on a white sheet. Out here we see how far we have come in spiritual life and how far we have to go. Yet, this is encouraging; it increases our desire for purification, so that one day we may become qualified to reside eternally in Vṛndāvana.

War and pious deeds have often come together at this ancient North Indian site.

KURUK



Kurukshetra, about one hundred miles north of New Delhi, is best known as the place where the great battle of the Mahābhārata was fought and Lord Kṛṣṇa spoke the Bhagavad-gītā. But long before that, Kurukshetra had played a dominant role in the history and culture of ancient India. For thousands of years it was a hub around which the Vedic civilization spun in its full glory. Kurukshetra's religious importance is described in many scriptures, including the Bhagavad-gītā, the Mahābhārata, and various Upaniṣads and Purāṇas. The scriptures refer to it as a place of meditation and an abode of demigods. The atmosphere of Kurukshetra is still charged with the chanting of Vedic hymns, especially the Bhagavad-gītā.

The first verse of the Gītā refers to Kurukshetra as dharma-kṣetra, or "the field of dharma," indicating that it was already known as a holy place. Today one can find many ancient temples and sacred lakes at Kurukshetra, an area of about one hundred square miles between the sacred rivers Sarasvatī and Dṛṣādvatī in Haryana state.

Kurukshetra was formerly known as Brahmakṣetra, Bṛghukṣetra, Āryavarta, and Samanta Pañcaka. It became known as Kurukshetra because of the work of King Kuru.

SHETRA

The Land of Dharma

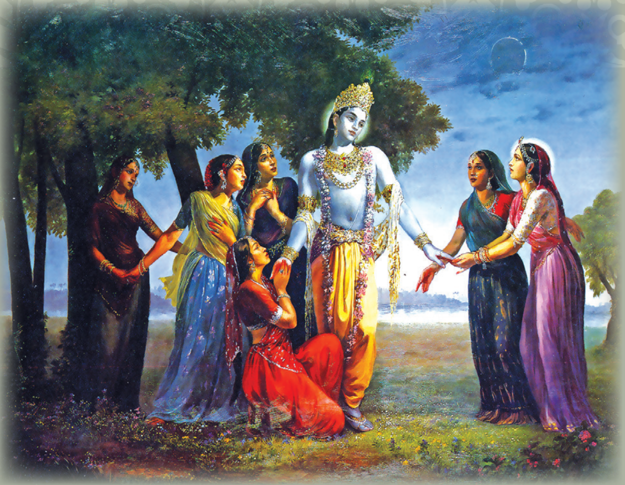
The Mahābhārata tells of how King Kuru, a prominent ancestor of the Pāṇḍavas, made the land a great center of spiritual culture. King Kuru went there on a golden chariot and used the chariot's gold to make a plow. He then borrowed Lord Śiva's bull and Yamarāja's buffalo and started plowing. When Indra arrived and asked Kuru what he was doing, Kuru replied that he was preparing the land for growing the eight religious virtues: truth, yoga, kindness, purity, charity, forgiveness, austerity, and celibacy.

Indra asked the king to request a boon. Kuru asked that the land ever remain a holy place named after himself, and that anyone dying there go to heaven regardless of his sins or virtues. Indra laughed at the requests.

Undaunted, Kuru performed great penance and continued to plow. Gradually, Indra was won over, but other demigods expressed doubts. They said that death without sacrifice did not merit a place in heaven. Finally, Kuru and Indra arrived at a compromise: Indra would admit into heaven anyone who died there while fighting or performing penance. So Kurukshetra became both a battlefield and a land of piety.

When the Pāṇḍavas claimed their legitimate share of their paternal kingdom from their uncle Dhṛtarāṣṭra and his sons, the Kauravas, they were given the Khāṇḍava Forest in the south of the Kuru kingdom. There they built a magnificent city called Indraprastha, located where Delhi is today. The Kauravas kept Hastināpura, situated to the northeast of Delhi, as their capital.

Later, the Pāṇḍavas were exiled for thirteen years after Yudhiṣṭhira's defeat in a game of dice. After the exile, the Pāṇḍavas demanded the return of their kingdom. On behalf of the Pāṇḍavas, Lord Kṛṣṇa went to Duryodhana, the eldest Kaurava, and begged



Krishna Meeting the gopis at Kurukshetra

for five villages for the five Pāṇḍavas. But proud Duryodhana refused to give any land. "I won't even give them enough land to fit on the tip of a pin," he said.

The war was therefore unavoidable, and the Kauravas and Pāṇḍavas decided to fight at Kurukshetra, because it was large, uninhabited, and abundant with water and fuel-wood.

The Pāṇḍavas won the Battle of Kurukshetra, which lasted only eighteen days.

The Battle of Kurukshetra began on the day known as Mokṣadā Ekādaśī. (Ekādaśī is the eleventh day of either the waxing or waning moon, and mokṣadā means "giver of liberation.") On that day, Kṛṣṇa enlightened Arjuna with the knowledge of Bhagavad-gītā, liberating him. Now every year on that day—considered the birthday of Bhagavad-gītā—festivals in honor of the Gītā are held at Kurukshetra and many other places in India. The grand festival in Jyotisar, the spot where the Gītā was spoken, is organized as a state function, with chief ministers and governors presiding. Coincidentally, this is also the time of ISKCON's annual Prabhupāda Book Marathon, when devotees distribute hundreds and thousands of copies of Śrīla Prabhupāda's Bhagavad-gītā As It Is in India and around the world.

Once, when Kṛṣṇa was preparing to go to Kurukshetra at the time of a solar eclipse, He invited the gopīs (cowherd girls) and other residents of Vṛndāvana to meet Him at Kurukshetra. When He had left Vṛndāvana in His youth, He had promised to return very soon. But He had been away for a long time (about a hundred years), so out of intense spiritual love, the residents of Vṛndāvana had always felt ecstatic longing to see Him again.

The residents of Dvārakā (a majestic city) arrived at Kurukshetra on chariots; the residents of Vṛndāvana (a simple cowherd village), on ox carts. Because the families of Vṛndāvana and Dvārakā were related, a joyful reunion took place.

Of all the residents of Vṛndāvana, the leading gopī, Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī, had felt the pangs of separation from Kṛṣṇa more than anyone else. She and the other gopīs were determined to bring Kṛṣṇa back to Vṛndāvana. The loving exchange between Kṛṣṇa and the gopīs at Kurukshetra is the esoteric meaning behind the festival known as Rathayātrā ("Festival of the Chariots"). So whenever Hare Kṛṣṇa devotees put on Rathayātrās in cities around the world, they are proclaiming the glories of Kurukshetra.

SRILA PRABHUPADA AT KURUKSHETRA

Sumati Morarji, who in 1965 gave Śrīla Prabhupāda free passage to America on her steamship Jaladuta, remembered meeting Śrīla Prabhupāda at Kurukshetra for the first time during the 1950s. Śrīla Prabhupāda was sitting under a tree, chanting on beads. Sensing that he was a distinguished sādhu, Sumati Morarji approached him. She was impressed with his humility and devotion, and she mentioned this when Śrīla Prabhupāda went to see her in Bombay to ask her help in getting to America.

In October 1970, Śrīla Prabhupāda was traveling to Amritsar by train with a group of disciples. As the train arrived in Kurukshetra station, he said, "Just here, Lord Kṛṣṇa spoke Bhagavad-gītā five thousand years ago. People say that it does not exist, that it's a mythological place, a symbol of the field of the body and the senses. They say it is an allegorical place. But here we are at the Kurukshetra station."

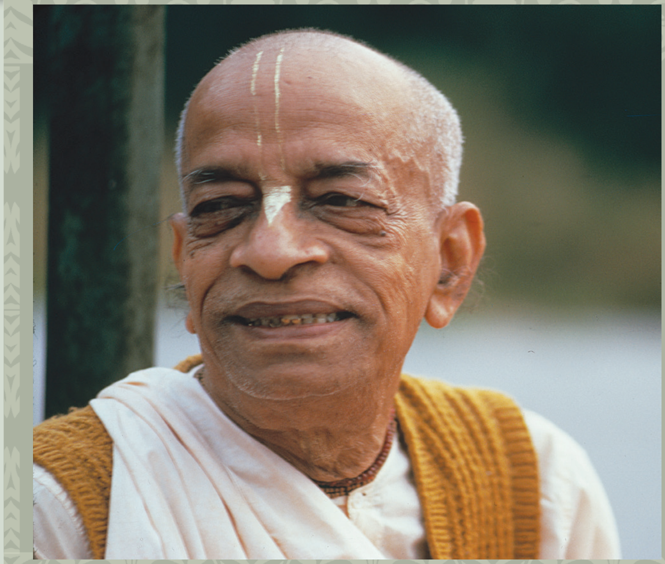
As he spoke, the sun was setting, and a bright orange sky shone over the flat land.

"How can they say Kurukshetra is not a real place?" he continued. "Here it is before us, and it has been a historical place for a long, long time."

On December 1, 1975, Śrīla Prabhupāda went to Kurukshetra with several disciples. Before returning to Delhi, he decided to visit a less developed area of Kurukshetra called Jyotisar, the actual place where Lord Kṛṣṇa had spoken the Bhagavad-gītā. Śrīla Prabhupāda walked about and thoroughly inspected the area. After ten minutes he asked the devotees what they thought of it. Everyone expressed enthusiasm about the place, which they sensed as spiritually vibrant. A deep, timeless wisdom and serenity seemed to permeate the atmosphere. Śrīla Prabhupāda told the devotees that ISKCON should build a temple of Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna there.

In 1996, the Śrīla Prabhupāda Centennial year, devotees made a special effort to obtain a parcel of land in Jyotisar. By the grace of Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna they succeeded in acquiring six acres, just a hundred yards away from the spot where the Bhagavad-gītā was spoken. In April 1998, the governor of Haryana presided over the ceremony dedicating the ground for the temple. At present, ISKCON runs a small temple in Thaneswar, a couple of miles from Brahma Sarovar. The devotees are planning, designing, and raising funds for the complex that Śrīla Prabhupāda wanted in Jyotisar.

Also during the Śrīla Prabhupāda Centennial year, a prominent square in the town of Kurukshetra was named after Śrīla Prabhupāda: Bhaktivedanta Swami Chouk [Square].



The Vāmana Purāṇa says that nine sacred rivers and seven sacred forests exist in the region.

SARASVATI RIVER

The beds of all the rivers except the Sarasvatī are difficult to find at Kurukshetra. But the Sarasvatī flows during the rainy season, and its bed is visible at other times.

JYOTISAR

At Jyotisar, Lord Kṛṣṇa spoke the Gītā, the spot marked by a marble chariot under a banyan tree. The tree is said to be more than five thousand years old, making it the oldest witness to Lord Kṛṣṇa's immortal conversation with Arjuna. Jyotisar is on the bank of the Sarasvatī, about five miles from the town of Kurukshetra.

BRAHMA SAROVAR

Lord Brahmā is said to have created the earth here. During solar eclipses hundreds of thousands

Jyotisar and the Immortal Banyan tree

of pilgrims come to take a holy dip in Brahma Sarovar, observing an ancient tradition. The beautiful Brahma Sarovar is larger than the other lakes in the area and is well maintained by the Kurukshetra Development Board. It has become the center of interest for pilgrims coming to Kurukshetra.

On the northern banks of Brahma Sarovar sits a Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa temple of the Gaudiya Math, the institution founded by Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura, the spiritual master of His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda. The Gaudiya Math temple was built to commemorate the reunion between Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa that took place at Kurukshetra five thousand years ago.

SAMANTA PANCAKA

Kurukshetra is known as Samanta Pañcaka ("five lakes") because here Lord Paraśurāma, an incarnation of Lord Kṛṣṇa, made five lakes from the blood of kṣatriyas he killed. (Lord Paraśurāma purged the earth of wicked kings and warriors twenty-one times.) Śrīla Prabhupāda said that the blood later turned into water.

One of the lakes is called Sannihit ("assembly"). On the new-moon day all the holy places personified are said to assemble in the lake. At the time of a solar eclipse, pilgrims are first led to Sannihit Lake, known as an abode of Lord Viṣṇu.

BAN GANGA

Ban Ganga, or Bhishma Kund, is a holy place about three miles from Kurukshetra. During the

Battle of Kurukshetra, Bhīṣmadeva, the grand-uncle of the Pāṇḍavas, lay here on his deathbed, made of arrows piercing his body. When he asked Arjuna to quench his thirst, Arjuna knew that the great Bhīṣma did not thirst for water of this world. So Arjuna pierced the earth with an arrow, and Ganges water gushed out like a fountain. Bhīṣma drank the holy water and thanked Arjuna for his great deed. Bhīṣma then instructed Yudhiṣṭhira on the path of dharma.

Pilgrims to Ban Ganga can worship a Deity of Lord Kṛṣṇa in His universal form and a 26-foot-high deity of Hanumān.

BAN GANGA (DAYALPUR)

This is a small village a couple of miles from Brahma Sarovar. Here Arjuna also brought forth the Ganges by shooting an arrow into the ground, this time to provide drinking water for his chariot horses during his single combat with Jayadratha.

KARNAVADHA

Karnavadha is a long trench where the wheels of Karṇa's chariot were stuck before Arjuna killed him.

PARASAR AND DVAIPAIN

Parāśara Muni, the father of Śrīla Vyāsadeva, had his āśrama here, about twenty-five miles south of the town of Thaneswar. Duryodhana hid in the lake here after running away from battle at the end of the Mahābhārata war. He came out of the water when the Pāṇḍavas challenged him to fight.

PEHOWA

Pehowa, seventeen miles west of Thaneswar, was formerly known as Prithudak, "the pool of Pṛthu." King Pṛthu, an incarnation of Lord Kṛṣṇa's ruling potency, performed last rites for his father here. Hundreds of pilgrims visit Pehowa every day to offer oblations to their ancestors.

CHAKRAVYUHA

At Chakravyuha, eight kilometers south of Thaneswar, the general Droṇācārya organized his army in the shape of a discus (cakra). It is also where Abhimanyu, the son of Arjuna and Subhadrā, was killed.

Pilgrims visit Ban Ganga

DADHICHI TIRTHA

At Dadhichi Tirtha, on the bank of the Sarasvatī, the sage Dadhīci had his āśrama long ago. The Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam relates that Indra once asked Dadhīci to give his bones to be made into a weapon for fighting the demons. Dadhīci complied with the request and gave up his life.

Kurukshetra, located in the state of Haryana, is a four-hour train ride from Delhi. There are also direct trains from Mumbai, Agra, Baroda, Chandigarh, and Simla.

WHERE TO STAY

Kurukshetra has several inexpensive or free guest houses (dharmshalas). The rooms are generally clean and are adequate if you don't mind roughing it a little. Otherwise, the best hotel in town is the centrally located Neelkanthi Krishna Dham Yatri Niwas. In Jyotisar, try the secluded Canal Guest House.

(This information comes from Holy Places and Temples of India, by Jada Bharata Dasa, available through The Hare Kṛṣṇa Catalog.)

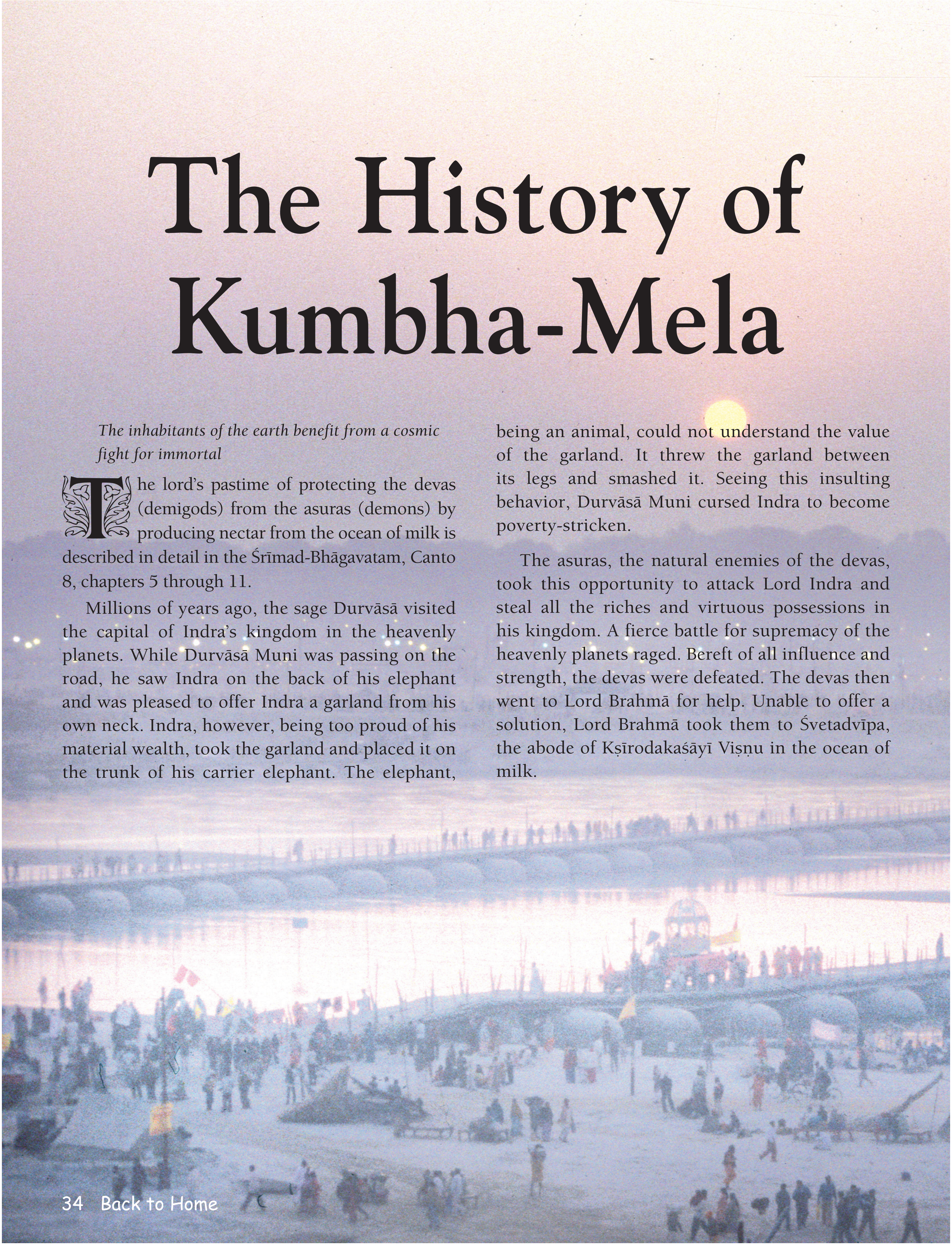
The History of Kumbha-Mela

The inhabitants of the earth benefit from a cosmic fight for immortal

The lord's pastime of protecting the devas (demigods) from the asuras (demons) by producing nectar from the ocean of milk is described in detail in the Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, Canto 8, chapters 5 through 11.

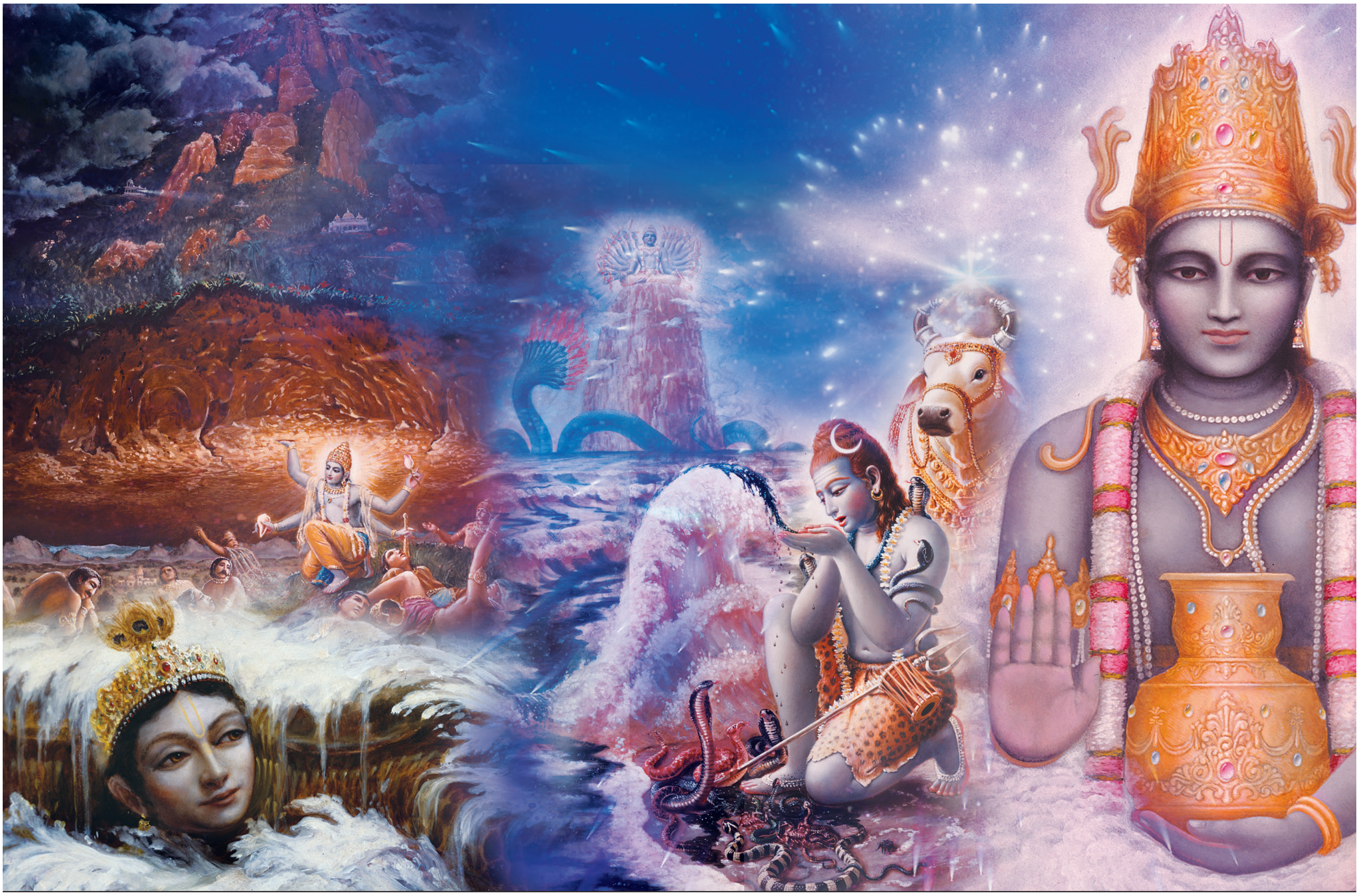
Millions of years ago, the sage Durvāsā visited the capital of Indra's kingdom in the heavenly planets. While Durvāsā Muni was passing on the road, he saw Indra on the back of his elephant and was pleased to offer Indra a garland from his own neck. Indra, however, being too proud of his material wealth, took the garland and placed it on the trunk of his carrier elephant. The elephant, being an animal, could not understand the value of the garland. It threw the garland between its legs and smashed it. Seeing this insulting behavior, Durvāsā Muni cursed Indra to become poverty-stricken.

The asuras, the natural enemies of the devas, took this opportunity to attack Lord Indra and steal all the riches and virtuous possessions in his kingdom. A fierce battle for supremacy of the heavenly planets raged. Bereft of all influence and strength, the devas were defeated. The devas then went to Lord Brahmā for help. Unable to offer a solution, Lord Brahmā took them to Śvetadvīpa, the abode of Kṣīrodakaśāyī Viṣṇu in the ocean of milk.



Snake-and-Mouse Logic

Lord Viṣṇu advised the devas to cooperate with the asuras and churn the ocean of milk to attain an immortal nectar that would make the devas invincible. He told the devas to follow the logic of the snake and the mouse in dealing with the asuras. A snake and a mouse were once caught in a basket. The snake said to the mouse, “Look, I could eat you very easily, but it’s more important for me to get out of this basket. So why don’t you make a hole so that we can both escape?” The mouse agreed and started working. But as soon as the hole was big enough, the snake ate the mouse and came out of the basket.



Similarly, the Lord wanted the devas to take help from the asuras, but He had no intention of giving any of the nectar to the asuras. He would appear as Mohinī-mūrti and cheat them.

The asuras and devas uprooted Mandara Mountain to use as a churning rod and requested Vāsuki, the king of the serpents, to serve as the churning rope. With the churning, the mighty golden Mandara Mountain began to sink slowly into the ocean of milk. The devas and asuras became discouraged at the turn of events.

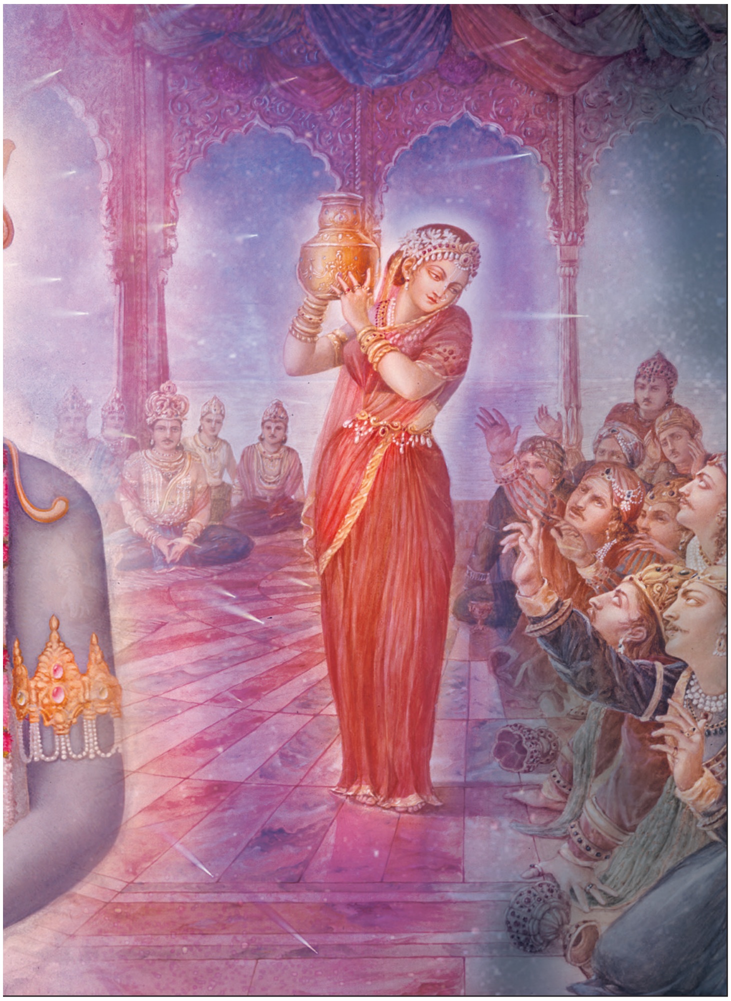
Then the Lord took the form of a tortoise, known as Kūrma-avatāra. He entered the water and held the great mountain on His back. The mountain moved back and forth with the churning motion, scratching the back of Lord Tortoise, who, while partially sleeping, was pleasingly experiencing an itching sensation.

Soon a fiercely dangerous poison was produced from the ocean, covering all directions. The compassionate Lord Śiva drank the poison and held it in His throat, turning his neck bluish and earning him the name Nīlakaṇṭha, "one who has a bluish neck."

Products of the Milk Ocean

The milk ocean then produced many wonderful items: a surabhi cow, a beautiful horse named Uccaiḥśravā, the elephant Airāvata, eight great white elephants that could go in any direction, eight she-elephants, the crescent moon, a conch shell named Pāñcajanya, a bow named Haridhānu ("the bow of Hari"), the goddess Vāruṇī, the precious Kaustubha jewel, a desire-fulfilling pārijāta flower, Apsarās (the most beautiful women in the universe), Lakṣmī (the goddess of fortune), and Dhanvantari.

A partial incarnation of the Lord, Dhanvantari rose slowly from the ocean. Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam (8.8.32–33) describes his beautiful form:



"He was strongly built; his arms were long, stout, and strong; his neck, which was marked with three lines, resembled a conch shell; his eyes were reddish; and his complexion was blackish. He was very young, he was garlanded with flowers, and his entire body was fully decorated with various ornaments. He was dressed in yellow garments and wore brightly polished earrings made of pearls. The tips of his hair were anointed with oil, and his chest was very broad. His body had all good features, he was stout and strong like a lion, and he was decorated with bangles. In his hand he carried a jug filled to the top with nectar."

The jug of nectar was the prize everyone was waiting for. The asuras quickly stole the jug, and they began to fight over who should take the first drink. While they argued, the Lord assumed the form of an extremely beautiful woman known as Mohinī-mūrti and slowly approached them.

Mohinī-mūrti said, "The demigods are very miserly and are excessively anxious to take the nectar first. So let them have it first. Since you are not like them, you can wait a little longer. You are all heroes and are so pleased with Me. It is better for you to wait until after the demigods drink."

The asuras, overwhelmed by Her beauty and charm, gave Her the jug of nectar, and She promptly delivered it to the devas.

The asuras were furious at the deception and attacked the devas with all their force. According to the Skanda Purāṇa, at one point during the fight, Jayanta, a son of Indra, took the kumbha (jug) and ran away toward the heavenly planets. The asuras followed, eager to retrieve the nectar, and the fierce fighting continued. From time to time during twelve days of fighting, circumstances compelled Jayanta to place the kumbha at four places on earth: on the bank of the Godavari River in Nasika, Maharashtra; at the Shipra River in Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh; at the Ganges in Haridwar, Uttar Pradesh, and at the Triveṇī-saṅgam in Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh.

When the kumbha was lifted at each location, some drops of nectar fell onto the earth. That same nectar appears at these sites during certain planetary configurations. Even today, millions of people come to partake of the nectar, to become immortal by bathing in the holy rivers and drinking the nectarlike waters. Because the fighting between the devas and the asuras lasted for twelve earth years (twelve demigod days), Kumbha-melās are held at each of these sites once every twelve years.

The Significance of Prayag

The Significance of Prayag The word prayag refers to a place where great sacrifices are held. Many ages ago, Lord Brahma chose as a place for sacrifice a prime piece of land encircled by three sacred rivers: the Ganges, the Yamuna, and the Sarasvati. That site became known as Prayag. In A.D. 1573, the Mogul king Akbar erected a large fort at the confluence of the three rivers and renamed the city Ilahabas or Ilahabad, “the city of Allah.” From that time, Prayag became known as Allahabad.

The confluence of the three rivers is known as the Triveni Sangam. Tri means “three,” veni refers to a braid, and sangam means “union.” The dark blue and black Yamuna flows swiftly into the white and grey Ganges. The Sarasvati flows underground. Bathing in any of these sacred rivers is purifying, but the purification is said to increase a hundred times where the rivers meet. The Varaha Purasa states: “In Prayag there is the Triveni. By bathing there one goes to heaven, and by dying there one gets liberation. It is the king of all tirthas [holy places of pilgrimage] and is dear to Lord Visnu.” Lord Brahma has said, prayagasya pravenenu papam nanyanti tatknanam: “All sins are at once cleansed upon entering Prayag.” Many exalted saints and sages have visited Prayag. Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, Lord Nityananda, and Advaita scarya all spent time there during pilgrimage tours.

NOTABLE PILGRIMS

Allahabad has been visited in every age by either the Lord Himself or His pure devotees, making this holy place significantly holier. During Treta-yuga, Lord Ramacandra, Laknmana, and Sitadevi spent some time at Bharadvaja Muni’s asrama near the Triveni-sangam. This was the first place Lord Rama visited after departing from His capital, Ayodhya, to enter into exile.

It is not recorded whether or not Lord Krsna visited Prayag during Dvapara-yuga. But His intimate devotees the five Pandavas, Yudhin˜hira, Arjuna, Bhima, Nakula and Sahadeva, spent some time there. Their visit to Prayag is mentioned in the Varnparva section of the Mahabharata which deals with their pastimes while in exile in the forest.

Approximately five hundred years ago, sri Caitanya Mahabrabhu visited Allahabad and on ten successive days bathed in the Triveni-sangam. His visit is described in the Caitanya-caritamrta. He was there during the early

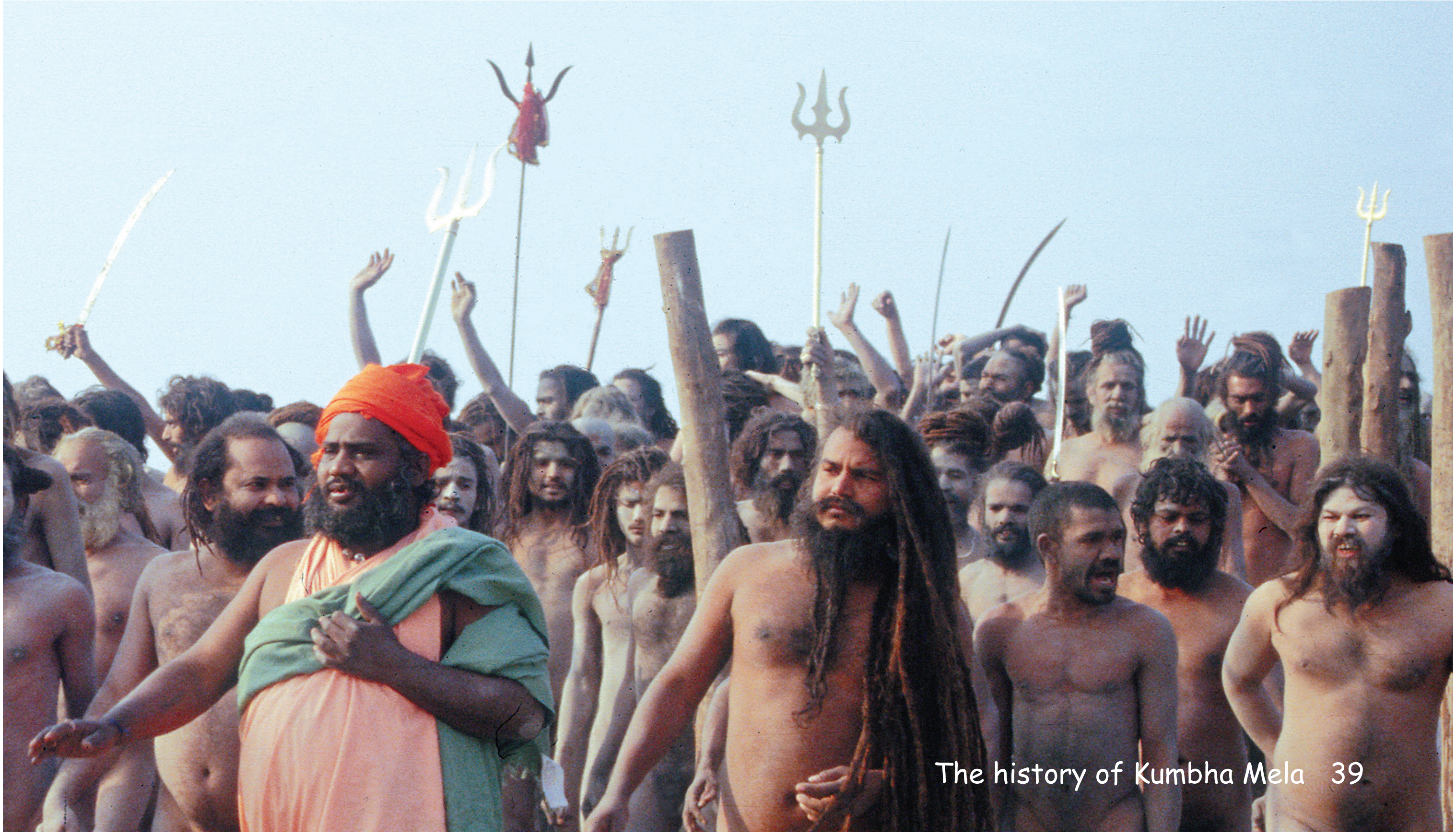
Magha-mela. When the Lord went to see the temple af Bindhu Madhava, He was followed by thousands of people, all hankering for His association. It is mentioned in the Caitanya-caritamrta that although the river was low at that time and therefore could not flood Allahabad, sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu inundated the whole area with the waves of the chanting of the holy names of the Lord: Hare Krsna, Hare Krsna, Krsna Krsna, Hare Hare, Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare. By performing the sankirtana-yajṣa at this confluence, a place meant for sacrifices, He set the example for all future pilgrims coming to the Kumbha-mela. It was also here at the time of Kumbha-mela that sri Citanya Mahaprabhu instructed Rupa Gosvami.

PRABHUPADA AT ALLAHABAD

For thirteen years Śrīla Prabhupāda lived in Allahabad. He moved there in 1923 with his family. Allahabad was a good location to start his pharmaceutical business, Prayag Pharmacy. He entered a business partnership with a physician, Dr. Ghosh, who diagnosed patients and gave medical prescriptions, which Prabhupāda would fill. Motilal Nehru and his son, Jawaharlal, (the future Prime Minister of India) were both customers at Prabhupāda's pharmacy.

During his time in Allahabad, Prabhupāda stayed in contact with Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī, whom he had first met in 1922 in Calcutta. On November 21, 1932, under the direction of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta, the Allahabad Gauḍīya Maṭha held a cornerstone-laying ceremony for their new temple. The governor, Sir William Haily, was the respected guest. Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta held an initiation ceremony, and Prabhupāda received initiation (harināma and Gāyatrī) from him.

Previously, upon learning that Prabhupāda had requested initiation, Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta had remarked, "He likes to hear. He does not go away. I have marked him. I will accept him as my disciple."



The Vedic literature states that whoever bathes in the Triveṇī-saṅgam at the auspicious time of the Kumbha-melā is guaranteed of liberation from birth and death. That is why the Melā has always attracted millions of pilgrims.

Yet Śrīla Prabhupāda said, "We are not interested in liberation. We have come to preach devotional service. Being engaged in Kṛṣṇa's unalloyed devotional service, we are already liberated."

In contrast to almost everyone present, Prabhupāda emphasized giving spiritual knowledge as the prime reason for attending the Melā. The devotee's only ambition is to enlighten as many people as possible. Pilgrimage was secondary. With this mood, the devotees attended the 1971 Kumbha-melā with Prabhupāda and enthusiastically presented Kṛṣṇa consciousness to the millions of pilgrims.

None of the western devotees had ever attended the Kumbha-melā. The many bizarre sights can bewilder and confuse the mind, but Prabhupāda reminded the devotees that spiritual life is neither exotic nor bewildering, but simple and practical.

"To go to a holy place means to find a holy person and hear from him," Prabhupāda had said. "A place is holy because of the presence of the saintly persons."

In a conversation recorded in January 1977 (just before the Kumbha-melā), Prabhupāda said that the real purpose of the Kumbha-melā is to take advantage of the spiritual knowledge presented there:

> The Kumbha-melā is sat-saṅga. If you go to the Kumbha-melā to find out a man of knowledge, then your Kumbha-melā is right. If one thinks that this śalila, the water—to take bath in the water—is Kumbha-melā, then he is a go-kharaḥ [a cow or an ass]. But the real idea is "Now there are assembled so many saintly persons. Let me take advantage of their knowledge." Then he is intelligent. People should take advantage. You can go to different groups of saintly persons. Different groups means brahmeti paramātmeti bhagavān iti. There are some yogis, some jñānīs, some bhaktas. They are of the same category, little difference. But they're all spiritual. They have no interest in this material world.

SOME REAL YOGIS

Śrīla Prabhupāda said that although many of the sadhus present were inauthentic and didn't really know the highest goal of human life, many were perfect yogis. These yogis, from remote parts of

India, would come out for the Melā and then return to seclusion.

"I have personally seen," Prabhupāda said, "that they take bath in the Ganges and come up in the seven sacred rivers. They go down in the Ganges and come up in the Godavari River. Then they go down and come up in the Krishna River, and go down, like that."

The devotees, therefore, should respect everyone who attended the Melā.

Prabhupāda also explained that one is not liberated automatically by taking bath at the Kumbha-melā on the specific auspicious days. But by coming to the holy tīrtha and taking bath on the holy days, the door to liberation gets opened.

"If you are trying to enter a room and the door is closed," he said, "there is some prohibition. It is more difficult for you to enter the room. But if the door is opened for you, then your entrance to the room is easier."

MONKEY RENUNCIATION

After the 1977 Kumbha-melā, the story of the death of a Naga Baba made the national newspapers. Wearing no clothing, he had died from the extreme cold.

Prabhupāda commented on the incident.

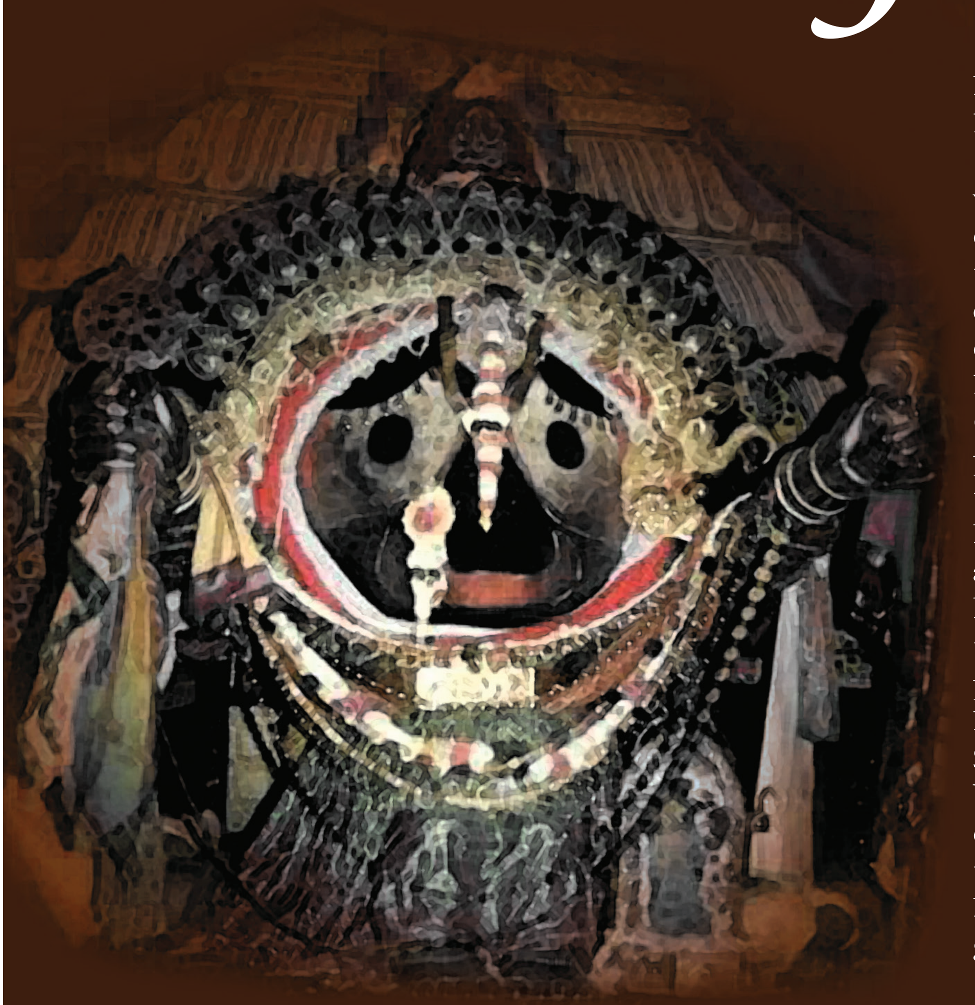
"He must die. They imitate. They have no sādhana [regulated spiritual practice], no bhajana [worship], and simply nāgā [naked]."

The devotees told Prabhupāda that the imitators smoke chillums (marijuana) and become so intoxicated that they don't feel the cold. One disciple told Prabhupāda that he had seen a Naga who had been smoking cigarettes for twelve years without stopping. Another man had been holding his arm up in the air for the past twelve years. His fingernails had grown very long, and his arm was flat. Another renunciant hadn't sat down for eighteen years. He carried a small swing with him, which he would tie to a tree and lean on.

"This is markaṭa-vairāgya, the renunciation of a monkey," Prabhupāda said, referring to the type of renunciation that, although difficult to perform, doesn't produce any advancement in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. The monkeys also have no clothes to wear and live in treetops in the secluded forest, but the male monkeys have a large group of female monkeys to sport with.

Some devotees concluded that severe penance was not recommended anywhere in the Vedas, but Prabhupāda corrected them: "No, Hiraṇyakaśipu did it. But what did he gain? He became a rākṣasa [demon] and was killed."

Rathayatra



Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu spent His later years in Jagannātha Purī, Orissa, immersed in love of Godhead and absorbed in wonderful pastimes with His intimate associates and with the Deity of Kṛṣṇa in Purī, known as Jagannātha, "the Lord of the universe." This was nearly five hundred years ago.

One of the most attractive of Lord Caitanya's pastimes was His role in the yearly Rathayātrā, the Festival of the Chariots, in which Lord Jagannātha parades through the main street of the city on a huge decorated cart pulled by devotees. Year after year—for eighteen years altogether—Lord Caitanya took part in the Rathayātrā festival in Purī.

Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu was Kṛṣṇa Himself in the mood of Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī. So during the festival He used to chant and dance in front of Lord Jagannātha's cart, acting out a drama. Śrīla Prabhupāda, commenting on the Caitanya-caritāmṛta, where these pastimes are described, says that the two Lords—Lord Caitanya and Lord Jagannātha—were reenacting a conjugal pastime, or mādhurya-līlā. Lord Caitanya, absorbed in transcendental emotions, would play the role of Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī, Lord Jagannātha's eternal consort. Sometimes Lord Caitanya would fall behind Lord Jagannātha's cart. The cart would then stop as Jagannātha tried to catch sight of Caitanya Mahāprabhu, attracted by His graceful and enchanting dancing.

The two Lords were reenacting the pastimes performed five thousand years ago in the holy place of Kurukṣetra when Śrī Śrī Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa met after many years of separation. They had last seen each other in Vṛndāvana, when Akrūra had come to take Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma to nearby Mathurā. That day had been the worst day for Rādhārāṇī, the gopīs (cowherd girls), and all the Vrajavāsīs (residents of Vṛndāvana). As Kṛṣṇa left, He promised that after killing the demons outside Vṛndāvana He would return.

Kṛṣṇa, the life of the Vrajavāsīs, stayed in Mathurā for some time and then moved to Dvārakā, where He continued His wondrous

Pastimes

pastimes. During these many years, Rādhā and the Vrajavāsīs intensely, almost unbearably felt separation from Kṛṣṇa's lotus feet.

THE MEETING AT KURUKSETRA

When Nanda Mahārāja (Kṛṣṇa's father) and Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī and the other residents of Vṛndāvana learned of Kṛṣṇa's plan to visit Kurukṣetra, not far away, they at once decided to go there. The long-awaited meeting of Kṛṣṇa with these devotees from Vṛndāvana took place in Kurukṣetra on the occasion of a solar eclipse, when the residents of Dvārakā came to bathe in Kurukṣhetra's holy lakes.

The residents of Dvārakā, members of the Yadu dynasty, erected their royal camp, and nearby the cowherd Vrajavāsīs parked their simple carts. Kṛṣṇa and His brother Balarāma, Their sister Subhadrā, and the residents of Dvārakā and Vṛndāvana like Vasudeva, Devakī, Nanda Mahārāja, Yaśodā Māyī, Rohiṇī, Rādhārāṇī, the gopīs—all met together, mingling and sharing one another' company.

The Vrajavāsīs and the gopīs were especially pleased to meet Kṛṣṇa, the Lord of their life. Yet they felt that meeting Him at Kurukṣetra was different from meeting Him in Vṛndāvana. They were accustomed to see Him as a simple cowherd boy, not as a royal prince. The Kurukṣetra setting left them unsatisfied. They wanted Kṛṣṇa to come back to Vṛndāvana.

When Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa met, Rādhārāṇī, unable to hide Her desire, expressed Her feelings in this way (*Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya-līlā* 13.126–131):

You are the same Kṛṣṇa, and I am the same Rādhārāṇī. We are meeting again the same way that We met in the beginning of Our lives. Although We are both the same, My mind is still attracted to Vṛndāvana-dhāma. I wish that You please again appear with Your lotus feet in Vṛndāvana.

Kurukṣetra is crowded with people, their elephants and horses, and the rattling of chariots. In Vṛndāvana, however, there are flower gardens where the humming of the bees and chirping of the birds can be heard. Here at Kurukṣetra You are dressed like a royal prince, accompanied by great warriors, but in Vṛndāvana You appeared just like an ordinary cowherd boy, accompanied only by Your beautiful flute.

Here there is not even a drop of the ocean of transcendental happiness that I enjoyed with You in Vṛndāvana. I therefore request You to come to Vṛndāvana and enjoy pastimes with Me. If You do so, My ambition will be fulfilled.

Rādhārāṇī also pleaded on behalf of the Vrajavāsīs: *"Why is it that You are simply keeping them alive in a state of suffering? The inhabitants of Vṛndāvana do not want You dressed like a prince, nor do they want You to associate with great warriors in a different country. They cannot leave the land of Vṛndāvana, and without Your presence they are all dying. What is their condition to be?" (Cc. Madhya 13.145–146)*

Hearing Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī's pleas further stirred Lord Kṛṣṇa's love for the residents of Vṛndāvana and perturbed His body and mind.

"My dearest Rādhārāṇī," the Lord said, "Please hear Me. I am speaking the truth. I cry day and night simply remembering all of You inhabitants of Vṛndāvana. No one knows how unhappy this makes Me.

"All the inhabitants of Vṛndāvana-dhāma—My mother, father, cowherd boyfriends, and everyone else—are like My life and soul.… I am always subservient to the loving affairs of all of You. I am under Your control only. My separation from You and residence in distant places have occurred due to My strong misfortune" (Cc. Madhya 13.149–151).

Full with the desire to take Kṛṣṇa back to Vṛndāvana, the gopīs tried to convince Him and pull His chariot. And again, just as when He had left Vṛndāvana on Akrūra's chariot, the Lord promised Rādhārāṇī He would return. *"Your loving qualities always attract Me to Vṛndāvana," Kṛṣṇa said. "Indeed, they will bring Me back within ten or twenty days, and when I return I shall enjoy both day and night with You and all the damsels of Vrajabhūmi"* (*Cc. Madhya* 13.158).

THE SECRET BEHIND LORD CAITANYA'S DANCING

In this meeting of Śrī Śrī Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa lies the secret behind Lord Caitanya's drama at the Jagannātha Purī Rathayātrā. Only a few of Lord Caitanya's intimate associates could understand it. Śrīla Prabhupāda comments that the whole mood of the Rathayātrā festival is that of bringing Kṛṣṇa back from Kurukṣetra to Vṛndāvana. The imposing temple of Lord Jagannātha in Purī is taken to represent the kingdom of Dvārakā, the place where Kṛṣṇa enjoys supreme opulence, and the temple of Guṇḍicā, to which the Lord is brought, stands for Vṛndāvana, the realm of His sweetest pastimes.

Assuming the part of Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī, Lord Caitanya felt the ecstasy of this most exalted of the gopīs. By falling behind the Rathayātrā cart, He was testing Lord Jagannātha, seeking His reciprocation: "Is Kṛṣṇa remembering us? I want to see. Does He really care for us? If He does care, then He will wait and try to find out where we are."

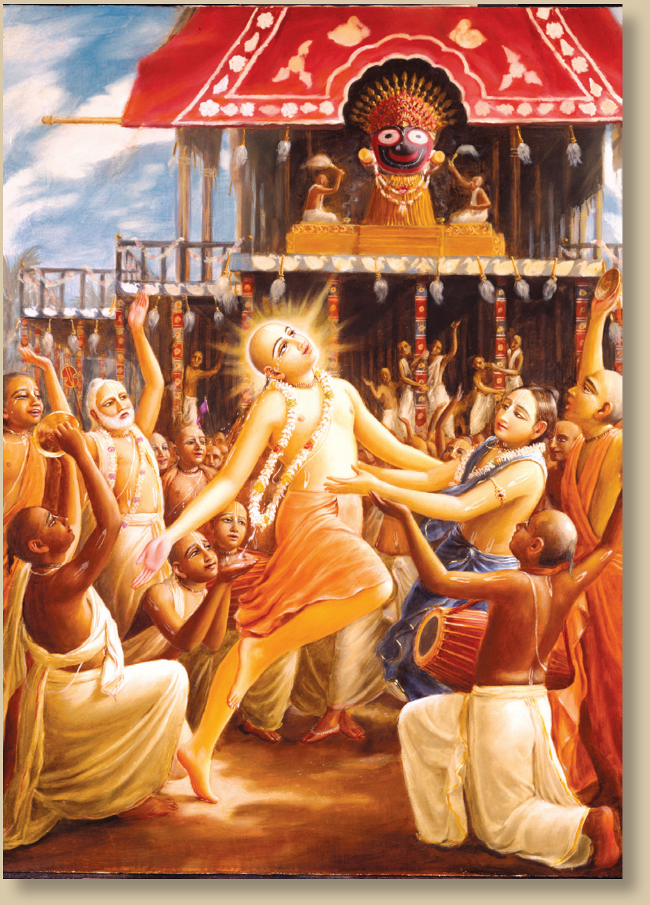
Amazingly, every time Lord Caitanya would go behind the Rathayātrā cart, it would stop. Lord Jagannātha was waiting, trying to see, "Where

is Rādhā? Where are the Vrajavāsīs?" Lord Jagannātha, who is Kṛṣṇa Himself, was trying to convey that transcendental feeling to Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu. "Even though I was away from Vṛndāvana, I have not forgotten You, My dear devotees, especially You, Rādhārāṇī."

THE DEITIES' UNUSUAL FORMS

Anyone who sees the forms of Lord Jagannātha, Lord Baladeva, and Subhadrā as They are worshiped in Jagannātha Purī may wonder why They look the way They do. Usually Kṛṣṇa is worshiped in His humanlike form of Śyāmsundara, playing the flute. Why would Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu choose to worship Lord Jagannātha, this crude, strange-looking form of the Lord? And why has such a form appeared in Purī in the first place? To discover the reason, let us go back to Kurukṣetra.

During the visit by the Vrajavāsīs, a confidential pastime took place. Rohiṇī, Lord Balarāma's mother, met in a big tent a group of residents of Dvārakā. She had been staying in Vṛndāvana and now wanted to tell the residents of Dvārakā how much suffering the Vrajavāsīs were going through because of separation from Kṛṣṇa. Before beginning her narration, she posted Subhadrā at the entrance of the tent. "If Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma come this way," Rohiṇī told her, "don't let Them in." She didn't want the Lords to hear her report, which would certainly agonize Them.



Lord Chaitanya in ecstasy

When Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma did happen to come by, Subhadrā dutifully stopped Them from getting in. But They managed to listen from outside the tent. As They began hearing, Kṛṣṇa, Balarāma, and even Subhadrā, who stood between Them, became motionless. They were completely dumbfounded, immersed in intense thoughts of Rādhā, the gopīs, and all the Vrajavāsīs.

Kṛṣṇa, Balarāma, and Subhadrā had heard of the Vrajavāsīs' feelings of separation, but never directly from a Vrajavāsī like Rohiṇī. As a result, Kṛṣṇa, Balarāma, and Subhadrā became simply astounded. Their eyes grew bigger and bigger in amazement, and other parts of Their bodies—arms, legs, and neck—withdrew into Their bodies, until Kṛṣṇa, Balarāma, and Subhadrā exactly resembled the Deities now worshiped at Purī.

HOW JAGANNATHA CAME TO PURI

How then did these forms come to be worshiped? A few thousand years ago, Viśvakarmā, the architect of the demigods, agreed to carve Deities of Lord Jagannātha, Baladeva, and Subhadrā, at the request of a great devotee king named Indradyumna. The king promised to let Viśvakarmā carve in seclusion until the work was finished. But the impatient king broke into the room early, and Viśvakarmā disappeared, leaving

behind the set of unfinished Deities. As the king began lamenting—for what would be the use of unfinished Deities?—Lord Jagannātha revealed His identity.

The Lord told the king that He had appeared in this form to fulfill the Vedic statement that although He is without hands and feet He accepts the offerings of His devotees and walks about to bestow His blessings upon the people of the earth. He added that the devotees who have achieved love of Godhead see Him as Śyāmasundara, Kṛṣṇa, the original Lord, holding a flute.

Then the sage Nārada came on the scene. He disclosed that Lord Kṛṣṇa had appeared in this particular form once before—in Kurukṣetra. Nārada himself had had the good fortune to see this. Hearing these statements, the king accepted Lord Jagannātha as his worshipable Lord. He understood that the form of the Deities was not an accidental creation: because he had been feeling intense separation from Kṛṣṇa, the Lord had appeared in this form. This was also a sign that the Lord had felt similar separation from the king. Overwhelmed with ecstasy, King Indradyumna began his worship. Since then these forms of Jagannātha, Baladeva, and Subhadrā have been worshiped in Purī.

THE IDEAL PLACE FOR CAITANYA MAHAPRABHU

It is not by chance that Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu lived in Purī and there worshiped the Deity of Lord Jagannātha. Lord Caitanya, during His final pastimes, showed more and more the mood of Rādhārāṇī. Day and night He lamented His separation from the Lord with intense feeling. Lord Jagannātha is the form Kṛṣṇa assumes as He thinks intensely and solely of the Vrajavāsīs, the gopīs, and Rādhārāṇī. Therefore the most appropriate Deity for Lord Caitanya, who had assumed the mood of Rādhārāṇī, was Lord Jagannātha.

THE MEANING OF THE RATHAYATRA FESTIVAL

Externally, Rathayātrā is spectacular—colorful and entertaining. Yet the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas, the followers of Lord Caitanya, see in the Festival of the Chariots much more than just a happy event. The pulling of the cart by the Lord's devotees symbolizes the attempt of the Vrajavāsīs, especially Rādhārāṇī and the gopīs, to bring Kṛṣṇa, Balarāma, and Subhadrā back to Vṛndāvana.

Vṛndāvana can also represent the heart of Kṛṣṇa's devotee. Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu prayed to Lord Kṛṣṇa, "For most people the mind and heart are one, but because My mind is never separated from Vṛndāvana, I consider My mind and Vṛndāvana to be one. My mind is already Vṛndāvana, and since You like Vṛndāvana, will You please place Your lotus feet there? I would deem that Your full mercy" (Cc. Madhya 13.137). For the devotees of Lord Jagannātha who follow in the footsteps of Lord Caitanya, pulling the Rathayātrā cart is like pulling their worshipable Lord, Jagannātha or Kṛṣṇa, into their heart.

FESTIVALS AROUND THE WORLD

The Lord of the universe now parades in major cities all over the world, increasing His mercy unlimitedly, responding to the desire of His pure devotee Śrīla Prabhupāda, who brought the Rathayātrā to the West. The first Rathayātrā outside India was held on July 9, 1967, in San Francisco. That year the Deities rode on a flatbed truck borrowed from a group of hippies. In later years the Deities were placed on a more traditional chariot, a large wooden structure decorated with canopies and flags and pulled through the streets by the festival-goers.

As years passed, the chariots were made taller, and more beautiful, and soon ISKCON began holding Rathayātrās in many cities: New York, Los Angeles, London, Paris, Rome, Zurich, Sydney, Vancouver, Toronto, Montreal, Guadalajara, Rio de Janeiro, Moscow. Śrīla Prabhupāda happily acknowledged, *"In 1973 there was a gorgeous Rathayātrā festival in London, England, and the car was brought to Trafalgar Square. The daily newspaper The Guardian published a front-page photo caption: 'ISKCON Rathayātrā is rival to the Nelson Column in Trafalgar Square.' "*

People everywhere are becoming attracted to the joyful and colorful Rathayātrā festival. Thousands of pleasure-seekers throng to behold the giant chariots, chant and dance a bit, enjoy tasty prasādam given free to all, or take part in a full festival of music, dance, exhibits, and spiritual entertainment. And because Lord Jagannātha is a most merciful form of the Lord, even those who hardly understand the philosophy behind Rathayātrā benefit just by seeing the festival or taking part in it.

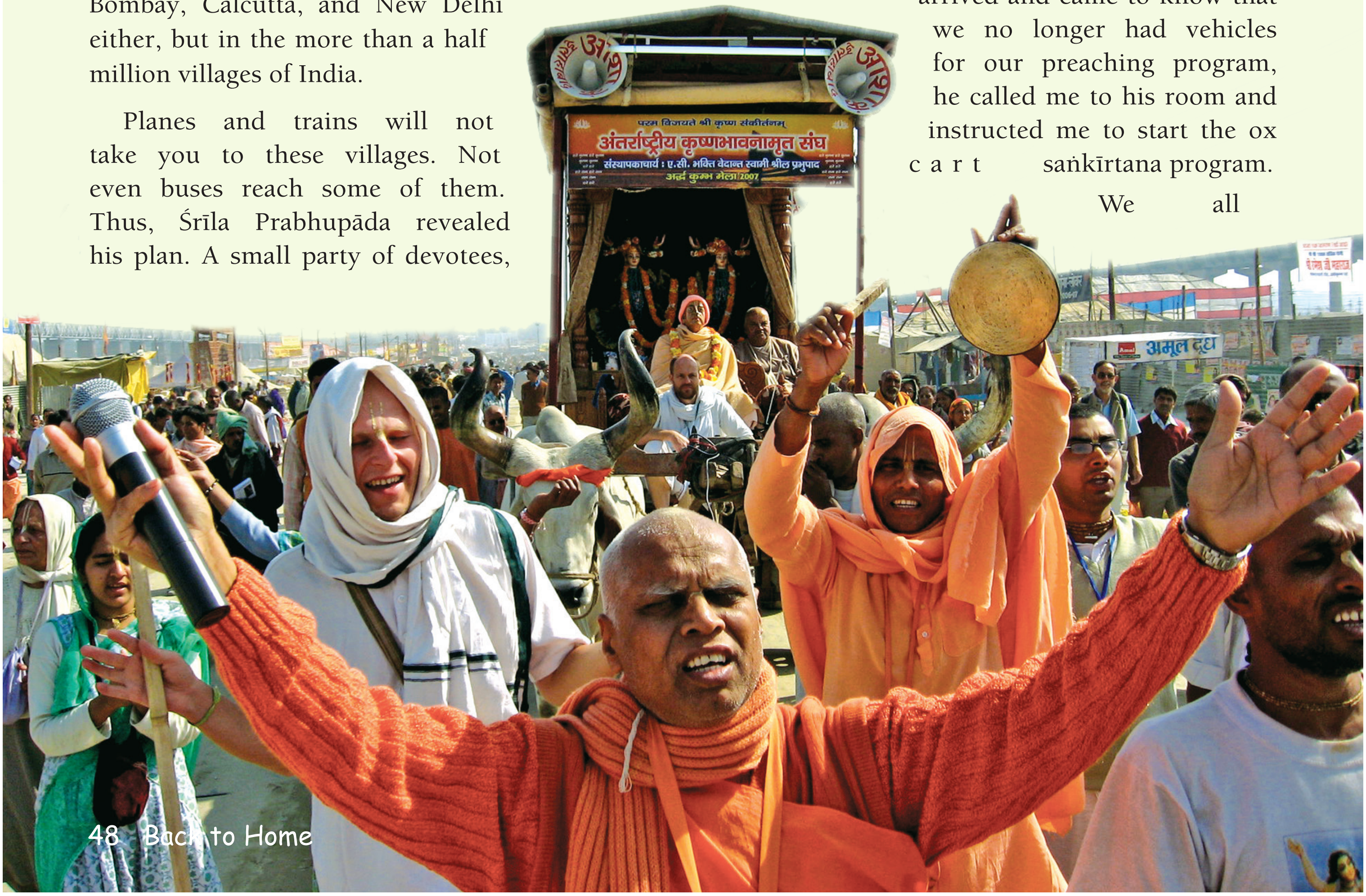
Lokanāth Swami has been a disciple of Śrīla Prabhupāda since 1972. He leads ISKCON's

OX CART SANKIRTANA

During the eleven years from 1966, when Śrīla Prabhupāda founded the International Society for Krishna Consciousness in New York City, to 1977, when he passed away in Vṛndāvana, India, he circled the world fourteen times, started temples, āśramas, schools, and farms on six continents, wrote more than seventy books, and introduced literally millions of people to the chanting of the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra. Yet in addition to this great concern for spreading Kṛṣṇa consciousness outside India, Śrīla Prabhupāda was also eager to revive it in his own country—and not just in the big cities like Bombay, Calcutta, and New Delhi either, but in the more than a half million villages of India.

Planes and trains will not take you to these villages. Not even buses reach some of them. Thus, Śrīla Prabhupāda revealed his plan. A small party of devotees, traveling from village to village by ox cart, would perform saṅkīrtana: chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa, distributing transcendental literature, and giving out prasādam (vegetarian food offered to Kṛṣṇa).

About the time that Śrīla Prabhupāda conceived his plan, I and about thirty other single male devotees had just finished traveling and preaching throughout parts of India in several Mercedes vans. Not only were the vans expensive to maintain and always breaking down, but in due course we had to ship them back to Germany, because their permits had expired. We were in New Delhi at the time, and when Śrīla Prabhupāda arrived and came to know that we no longer had vehicles for our preaching program, he called me to his room and instructed me to start the ox cart saṅkīrtana program. We all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संस्थापकाचार्य : ए.सी. भक्ति वेदान्त स्वामी श्रील प्रभुपाद
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rushed to Vṛndāvana, about ninety miles south, to get everything ready. The devotees at our Krishna-Balarām Mandir in Vṛndāvana had already heard of our ox cart saṅkīrtana, and they were enthusiastic to help us. The head priest came forward and offered his personal set of Gaura-Nitāi Deities. (Gaura is Lord Caitanya, and Nitāi is His spiritual brother, Lord Nityānanda.) We took this gift to be the special mercy of the Lord. Five hundred years before, Lord Caitanya had traveled extensively throughout India spreading Kṛṣṇa consciousness, and now once again He was to head up a program of traveling and preaching. The Lord's participation greatly inspired us.

Soon we had acquired some cooking pots and a supply of Śrīla Prabhupāda's books in Hindi. We also had a few thousand copies of a handbill that described our program and our destination—Māyāpur, the birthplace of Lord Caitanya. When everything was ready and we were all set to go, we went to see Śrīla Prabhupāda, who was now visiting Vṛndāvana, to get his blessings. He spoke to us about how Gandhi had wanted to stop the flow of people from the villages to the big cities, but had been unable to do so. Śrīla Prabhupāda said we could accomplish this, however, simply by giving the people a taste for the holy name of Kṛṣṇa. If they developed a taste for chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa, he said, they would be content with their simple life in the villages and wouldn't run after the illusory pleasures of the cities. They would remain at home, happy in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Finally, Śrīla Prabhupāda advised us always to camp near a well or other source of water. The well, he said, is the heart of the village.

With Śrīla Prabhupāda's blessings, about eight of us started from Vṛndāvana toward Māyāpur, nine hundred miles away. It was October 1976, and we planned to cover the distance in five months so we could attend the yearly festival at ISKCON's center in Māyāpur. We would pass through the states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and West Bengal.

When we started from Vṛndāvana, we had everything we needed—except the oxen and the cart. So we got a ride to Agra, the city of the Taj Mahal, where I sent the devotees out in pairs to the homes of our patron members to solicit funds for the oxen and the cart. I also sent two devotees to Jaipur for the same purpose. After a few days we had raised enough money, and we went to a weekly animal bazaar near Agra where we bought a pair of white oxen for a little more than two thousand rupees (about $230). We also bought a cart and equipped it with automobile tires. Now our ox cart saṅkīrtana party was ready to get into full swing.

India is thickly populated, with villages everywhere, so for us to stop in each village along the way would be impossible. Usually we would pass through a village chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa, passing out handbills, and trying to sell some of Śrīla Prabhupāda's books. As soon as we arrived in the village where we were going to stop for the night, most of us would get down and form a chanting party at the front of the cart. Only the driver and one other devotee, who held a big poster of Śrīla Prabhupāda, would stay in the cart.

As we passed along the main roads of the village chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa, two devotees would approach the houses on either side of the road. Carrying shoulder bags, they would beg for a little rice and dāl (beans) and whatever they needed for cooking. During this saṅkīrtana procession, someone would always come forward and suggest a place where we could stay. Every village, small or large, had a temple or at least a public dormitory, and sometimes a farmer would invite us to stay at his house.

When we arrived at the place where we were to stay, we would unload our things, install the Deities, and immediately begin cooking. We had no gas or kerosene stove, so our cook would simply find three medium-size rocks or some bricks and make a fireplace, while several devotees collected wood for fuel and several others collected grass for the bullocks.

Then I would have a devotee take a megaphone and go throughout the village to announce our evening program of kīrtana, ārati (offering of incense and other articles to the Deities), lecture, and prasādam. The turn-out was always good. Sometimes everyone in the village would come. In many villages the people were already practiced to chant the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra, and they would participate in the kīrtana very enthusiastically.

After the lecture, the last and most popular part of the program would be the distribution of prasādam. We would serve kicharī (a spicy dish made with rice, dāl, and vegetables), and the villagers would come for seconds and even thirds.

We would also have our early-morning devotional program, of course, but that was mainly for the devotees, although sometimes a few villagers would also participate. Without fail the devotees would get up early (around 4:00) and bathe—either by dipping into a nearby river or pond or by drawing water from the village well and throwing a few bucketfulls over themselves. And then, as at any ISKCON temple, we would have maṅgala-ārati at 4:30. Then we would go through the village chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa and singing a song called Jīva Jāgo ("O Sleeping Souls, Wake Up!"). Both adults and children would come running straight from their beds. The sound of the drum, the cymbals, and the holy name reminded them of Kṛṣṇa and of their Kṛṣṇa culture, and they were invariably pleased.

After our kīrtana through the village, we would return to our camp, do our japa (private chanting on beads), and have a class on the Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam. Then one or two devotees would cook breakfast. After taking prasādam, we would load everything back into the cart, and by 9:00 we would be ready to start.

In some villages the people were so enthusiastic that we would spend two or three days. Sometimes they wouldn't let us proceed, but would beg us to stay for a few more days. Because of this popularity we were averaging only about twenty miles per week.

For the most part, the villagers were very simple and friendly. We spoke their language, we talked about their welfare, we entertained them with kīrtana, and we fed them with prasādam. They would all honor the bullocks, the cart, and the devotees—especially the foreign devotees, who were the main attraction. The villagers would always follow them and look for a way to interact with them. In most of the villages we visited, no one had ever seen a foreigner.

And these foreigners weren't just ordinary foreigners—they were foreign sādhus! Their bodies may have been foreign, but the religion they were practicing wasn't at all foreign: it was the villagers' very own, which they were unfortunately no longer following very strictly. For these villagers, seeing foreign devotees of Lord Kṛṣṇa was a big surprise and also a necessary reminder. The foreigners were requesting the villagers to study the Bhagavad-gītā, their own most holy book, and to chant the holy name of Lord Kṛṣṇa, who had appeared in their country and who was supposed to be their worshipable Lord.

Today most Indians, including those living in the villages, are busy imitating the Westerners. The people in the villages are eager to go to the cities, and the people in the cities are looking forward to the day when they can go to the West. Śrīla Prabhupāda's idea was that if the Indians at all want to imitate the Westerners, let them imitate these Westerners—who have taken up Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Then, by such imitation, all of India would again be Kṛṣṇa conscious, to its great benefit.

In January we reached Allahabad, the city where three holy rivers converge. It was the year of the Kumbha-melā, a large gathering of the faithful that takes place every twelve years at that city, and Śrīla Prabhupāda had come from Bombay by train to participate in ISKCON's programs. When we met him, he gave us a lot of attention and mercy. He heard our ox cart saṅkīrtana stories at length, and he especially appreciated how the devotees would go from door to door begging handfuls of rice or anything else the householders would offer. The begging taught the devotees humility and engaged the villagers in Kṛṣṇa's service.

At the Kumbha-melā several devotees joined us, and now we had about a dozen on the ox cart.

Book distribution ki Jai!

We had the Deities, books, pots, the devotees' personal things, sacks of grain, some food for the oxen, and on top of everything, a dozen devotees—all in one ox cart!

Next we reached Vārāṇasī, a famous holy city on the banks of the Ganges. In February the Māyāpur festival was to take place, and since we were behind schedule, we decided to load our whole show into a truck and get to West Bengal fast.

Arriving in West Bengal, we again began traveling by ox cart from village to village. We had many ecstatic adventures. Especially successful was our program of distributing prasādam. As our saṅkīrtana party would reach the gate of someone's home, the ladies of the house would come out and wash the feet of all the devotees, offer obeisances, receive us with folded hands, and offer us a basketful of rice with some vegetables on top. So we carried on our simple traveling and preaching in the land of Lord Caitanya.

When finally we reached Navadwip, just across the Ganges from Māyāpur. we were greeted by crowds of enthusiastic people. They were surprised at the simple ox cart saṅkīrtana organized by the Hare Kṛṣṇa devotees. On top of the cart, as usual, a devotee held up a big portrait of Śrīla Prabhupāda, and everyone got the blessing of seeing His Divine Grace, as they happily joined in the chanting of Hare Kṛṣṇa. At the bank of the Ganges we loaded everything into a small ferryboat and headed for Māyāpur.

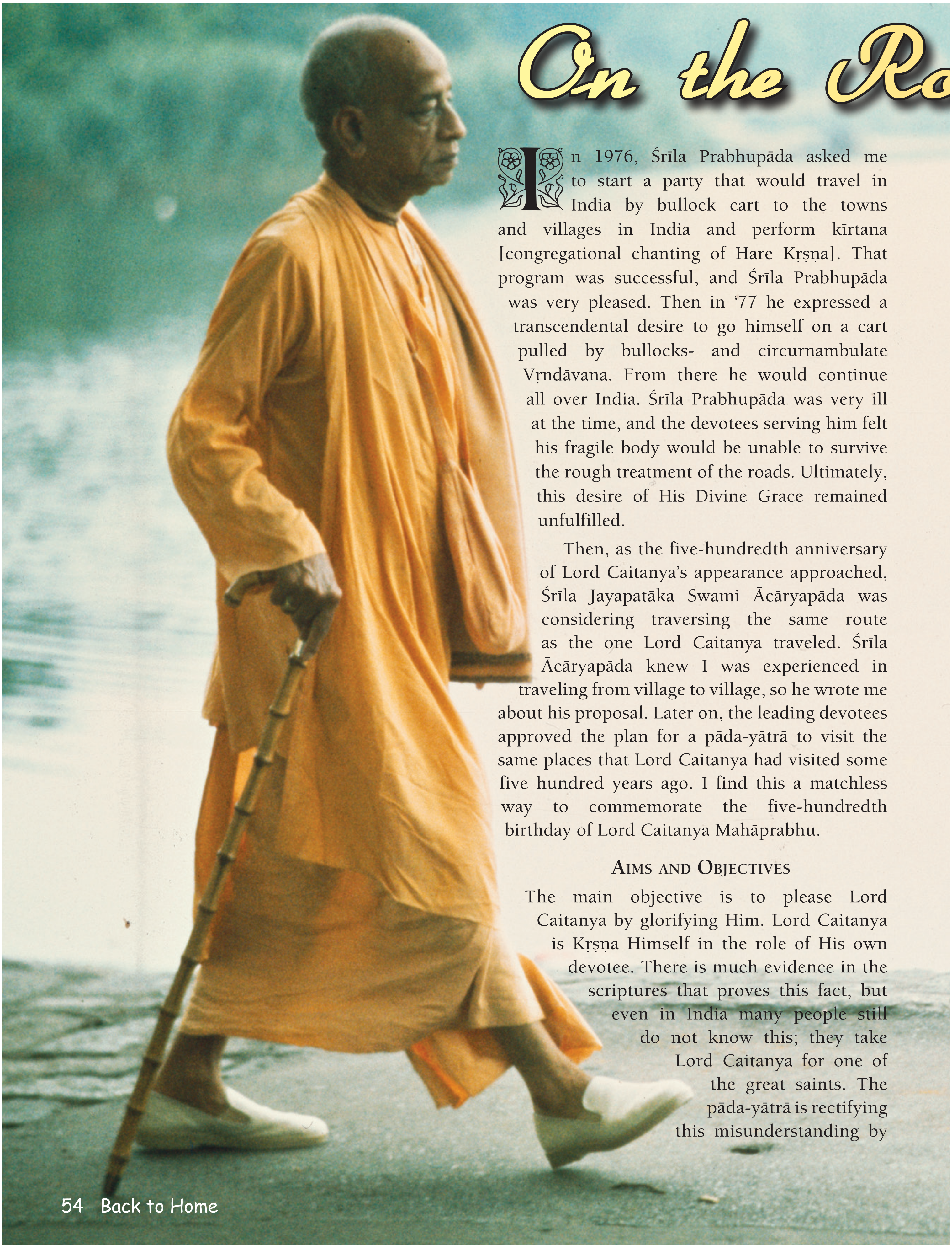
Upon arriving at ISKCON's Māyāpur project, we held a big kīrtana as we passed through the gates. We went all the way up to the temple and entered. Just as we entered, the curtains opened, and we had an ecstatic view of the Lord in His Deity incarnation. Then we went up the stairs—and there was Śrīla Prabhupāda on the balcony. He immediately called us into his room and had us garlanded and given milk sweets. We sat down at Śrīla Prabhupāda's feet, and he asked us about the journey. He was smiling. He was satisfied, and that was our perfection.

We explained to him that we'd visited seventy-two villages between Vṛndāvana and Māyāpur. When we had come to large highways, we had marveled at how everyone was running and riding in a great hurry. They were going nowhere, we had realized, whereas we were marching slowly but steadily back home, back to Godhead. Once one of our tires had been punctured, and we had had to pay four rupees (about fifty cents) to get it repaired. That had been our only expense throughout the entire journey!

As I sat with Śrīla Prabhupāda, we expressed our sorrow that no new devotees had joined us. Because we had remained for only a very short time in each village, people hadn't had enough time to build up their faith in the chanting of Hare Kṛṣṇa and the philosophy of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. But Śrīla Prabhupāda encouraged us: "Do not mind," he said, "You have sown the seed. I am very happy to hear of your nice activities on ox cart saṅkīrtana. I wish I could have joined you. I like your program very much. If you continue this program, you will be benefited, the people will be benefited, and everyone will become happy in Kṛṣṇa consciousness."

(*Continued from page 5*)

that. So our educational system should be so arranged that there may be first-class, second-class, third-class, fourth-class men, not less than fourth-class men. Then the social structure will be in order and everyone will be peaceful, aiming at the point, how to go back to home, back to Godhead. Unless there is such structure of the society... Just like in our body we have got four divisions, the head, the arms, the belly and the leg. All of them are required. But the position of the head and position of the leg are different. Head means giving direction, and arms means giving protection, and belly means receiving food for energy of the body, and leg means working. So the human society must be divided into four section, and they should work combinedly, cooperatively. Then there will be peaceful condition for realization of the goal of life, back to home, back to Godhead. Our Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement is teaching this process of life, and the whole world is now in chaos on account of no brain. Just like we have got this body. If the brain is not working in good condition, then he is called a madman. So in spite of possessing other parts of the body, namely, the arm, the belly, and the leg, if the head is not in good condition, then the body is useless. At this present moment there is want of first-class men and also second-class men. The whole world is filled up with third-class, fourth-class, fifth-class men. Therefore the society is not properly adjusted. By accepting this Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement... The process is described very nicely in the Bhagavad-gītā. If we follow the principles of Bhagavad-gītā, we will find answers for all the problems of life, and if we take it seriously, then the whole human society will be happy, peaceful, in this life, and next life they will go back to home, back to Godhead for eternal blissful life of knowledge. So we are giving literary information in fifty books. Some of the books are distributed here. You can see. Otherwise, the process is very simple. If we chant the holy name of the Lord, we become purified, our heart becomes cleansed, and we can understand the aim of life, the goal of life, and in this way everything can be adjusted very nicely. Thank you very much.



On the Ro

In 1976, Śrīla Prabhupāda asked me to start a party that would travel in India by bullock cart to the towns and villages in India and perform kīrtana [congregational chanting of Hare Kṛṣṇa]. That program was successful, and Śrīla Prabhupāda was very pleased. Then in ‘77 he expressed a transcendental desire to go himself on a cart pulled by bullocks- and circurnambulate Vṛndāvana. From there he would continue all over India. Śrīla Prabhupāda was very ill at the time, and the devotees serving him felt his fragile body would be unable to survive the rough treatment of the roads. Ultimately, this desire of His Divine Grace remained unfulfilled.

Then, as the five-hundredth anniversary of Lord Caitanya’s appearance approached, Śrīla Jayapatāka Swami Ācāryapāda was considering traversing the same route as the one Lord Caitanya traveled. Śrīla Ācāryapāda knew I was experienced in traveling from village to village, so he wrote me about his proposal. Later on, the leading devotees approved the plan for a pāda-yātrā to visit the same places that Lord Caitanya had visited some five hundred years ago. I find this a matchless way to commemorate the five-hundredth birthday of Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu.

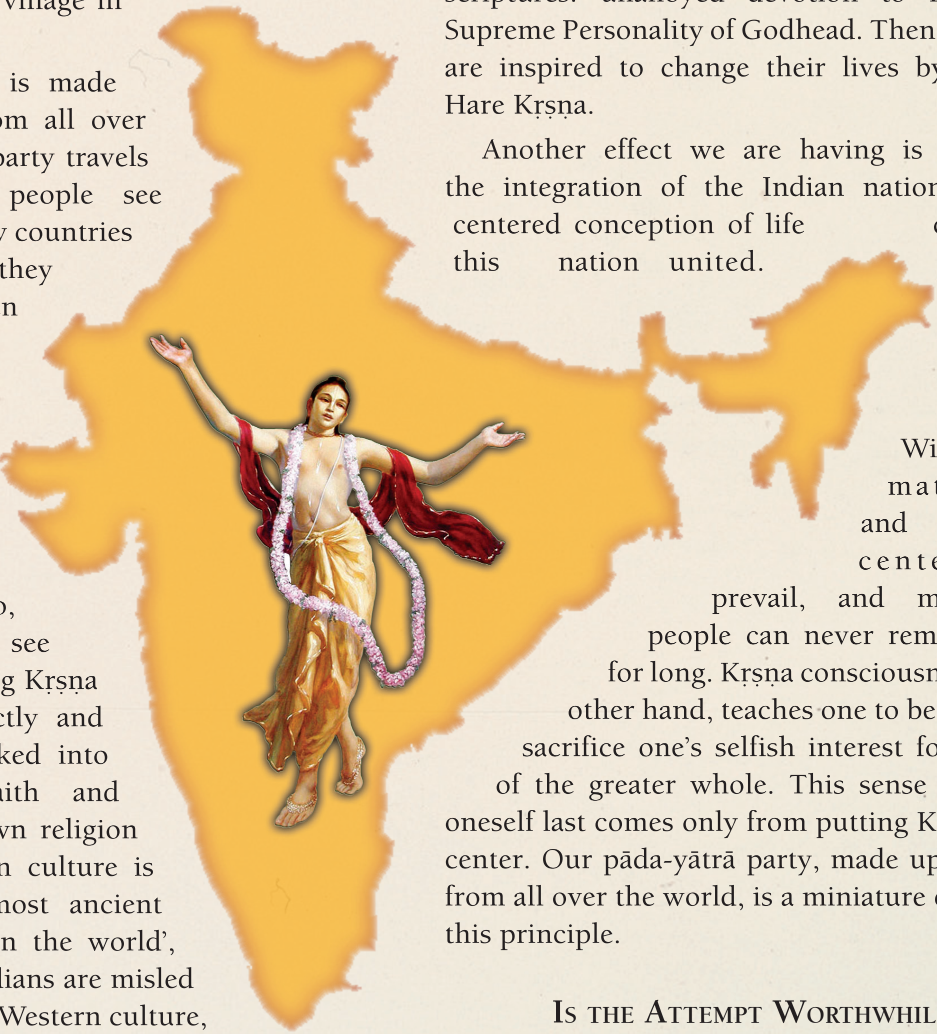
AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The main objective is to please Lord Caitanya by glorifying Him. Lord Caitanya is Kṛṣṇa Himself in the role of His own devotee. There is much evidence in the scriptures that proves this fact, but even in India many people still do not know this; they take Lord Caitanya for one of the great saints. The pāda-yātrā is rectifying this misunderstanding by

ad with Lord Caitanya

establishing that Lord Caitanya is the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

We also want to introduce Śrīla Prabhupāda as the specially empowered representative of Lord Caitanya who fulfilled His prediction that the holy name of Kṛṣṇa will be preached in every town and village in the world.



The pāda-yātrā is made up of devotees from all over the world. As the party travels the countryside, people see devotees from many countries and understand they represent even more devotees in their native lands. Thus the people can at once appreciate Śrīla Prabhupāda’s glorious position. Also, Indian people who see foreigners practicing Kṛṣṇa consciousness strictly and sincerely are shocked into reviving their faith and interest in their own religion and culture. Indian culture is the richest and most ancient surviving culture in the world’, but present-day Indians are misled by the allure of the Western culture, which is based on the ignorant misconception that the body is the self. Pāda-yātrā inspires them to take a second look at their cultural heritage.

Indian people who see so many Western devotees of Kṛṣṇa joyfully engaged in Kṛṣṇa consciousness are deeply impressed, because they know that these Western men and women have left the very society and value system that India is trying to imitate. In addition, we distribute thousands of books explaining the authentic understanding of the Indian spiritual traditions The people read these books and appreciate, many for the first time, the true purport of the scriptures: unalloyed devotion to Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Then the people are inspired to change their lives by chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa.

Another effect we are having is to further the integration of the Indian nation. A God-centered conception of life can keep this nation united. Without it, materialism and self-centeredness prevail, and materialistic people can never remain united for long. Kṛṣṇa consciousness, on the other hand, teaches one to be selfless, to sacrifice one’s selfish interest for the sake of the greater whole. This sense of putting oneself last comes only from putting Kṛṣṇa in the center. Our pāda-yātrā party, made up of people from all over the world, is a miniature example of this principle.

IS THE ATTEMPT WORTHWHILE?

Since we started on September 2 last year, we’ve gone almost three thousand kilometers, and the response throughout the journey has been overwhelmingly favorable, way beyond our expectations. We’ve reached millions. Every day thousands of people get the opportunity to realize the divinity of Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu. In the association of His devotees they feel inspired to regularly chant the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra, the greatest prayer for deliverance in this quarrelsome age.

One man who attended our program in the evening approached me the next day, as we were leaving his village. He had been so inspired by our program that he had begun reading Śrīla Prabhupāda's Bhagavad-gītā As It Is immediately and then finished five rounds of Hare Kṛṣṇa chanting before he went to bed. This man said he had taken a vow to do this daily, and he had wanted to start the very same day. We consider this kind of response the perfection of the pāda-yātrā.

Padayatra in full swing

Another thing the pāda-yātrā is doing is clearing up any misconceptions rural people may have about the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) by giving them firsthand information. For example, some people accuse ISKCON of being an organization for rich city people. But when they see the devotees walking through the countryside, satisfied with the accommodations and food offered by the villagers and working hard to spread Kṛṣṇa consciousness, they realize the devotees are genuinely interested in the welfare of all the people.

Another example: Some people think ISKCON devotees are idle hippie types. But when the people see that the devotees are happily following our four regulative principles—giving up meat-eating, intoxication, illicit sex, and gambling—and that they're always chanting the holy name of Kṛṣṇa as they walk along the road, the people can understand that this is a serious movement. Pada-yātrā is gaining a good name for ISKCON.

ENTHUSIASTIC RESPONSE

Many cabinet ministers, chief ministers, members of parliament, mayors, municipal commissioners, religionists, and scholars have received and appreciated the pāda-yātrā devotees. So this program is a success on many levels. Śrīla Prabhupāda would have been very pleased with it, and his pleasure is something that really matters to us.

For the devotees of Indian origin it's easier than for the foreign devotees. The weather sometimes gets very hot, and people aren't used to the heat. Out in the countryside we don't have the kind of facilities we're accustomed to in the cities. We often have to answer nature's call in the fields and stay in places with no real privacy. In the villages we sometimes get first-class facilities, but usually we get a big hall, and the whole party has to spend the night there with no partitions, no privacy. This is actually a very good thing, because it teaches detachment, tolerance, and humility. Kṛṣṇa consciousness is meant for austerity, not soft living. Devotees are grateful for the purification and for the advancement in Kṛṣṇa consciousness they're making on this pāda-yātrā.

A BIG JOB

Obviously, maintaining a party of one hundred devotees, five bullocks, a camel, and an elephant is not going to be easy. But the hospitality in the villages is really wonderful. That is what keeps us going. In the Indian cultural tradition one is trained to receive guests—especially sādhus, or saintly persons—as if God Himself had come to your home. This is changing with the times, but it is still dominant here in the Indian villages. Our advance party goes ahead and tells the people that the pāda-yātrā is coming and what accommodations we'll need. The news spreads quickly by word of mouth, and things begin to happen. The people arrange some accommodations, either in a school or a big temple, and they always feed us and usually our animals. Then there is always a nearby river or well to wash clothes and take our bath in. Sometimes we stay in dharmaśālas, dormitories meant exclusively for mendicant sādhus and pilgrims.

The villagers give us other things as well. In Rajkot, Gujarat, a man donated 150 pairs of shoes. Last winter, some patron members of ISKCON sent us blankets and sweaters. One of them personally came out to meet the party and deliver his gifts of warm clothes. And from some of the ISKCON temples in India we also get regular monthly cash contributions and sometimes free books for distribution. By the mercy of the devotees, villagers, and others, help keeps trickling in in one form or another.

LONGEST PADAYATRA IN HISTORY

This is the first pāda-yātrā ISKCON has organized. The Times of India, the leading daily paper, has described it as "a mahā-pada-yātrā," the longest pāda-yātrā in history, and with international participation. It is unique in many ways, but pāda-yātrās are not uncommon in India Whether for economic or spiritual reasons. individually or collectively, people prefer, walking to holy places. It sometimes take them weeks, but it is a common practice. Of course, though the real purpose of a pāda-yātrā is to give one a chance to make spiritual advancement, politicians some times use it for political purposes. Gandhi's 241-mile trek in 1930 in defiance of the Salt Act imposed by the British is the now famous pāda-yātrā in this century. A more recent attempt by another politician—a walk from Kanyā-kumārī, the southern most tip of India, to New Delhi—failed to give him the popularity he hoped for.

Now, ISKCON has already started two processions outside of India, in Mauritius and in Brazil, because of the success of this one in

India. One of our devotees from Gainesville, Florida, spoke to me earlier this year and said he wants to start one in the United States. When I was in America two years ago, the devotees in Washington, D.C., had a chanting party on a bullock cart; it got a lot of attention from the press. Also, the devotees on the Gītā-nāgarī farm in Pennsylvania sometimes distribute prasādam [food offered to Kṛṣṇa] in the villages and towns from bullock carts. So I think there is scope for this type of program in other parts of the world.

PADAYATRA UNTIL 1996

Śrīla Tamāl Krishna Goswami suggested to me that the pāda-yātrā should not stop after the festival in 1986. I completely agree. This is the best program for establishing Kṛṣṇa consciousness at the grassroots level in India. My plan is to continue northwest after our annual festival in Māyāpur in March 1986, all the way to Vṛndāvana. En route we will pass through Gayā, Benares, Ayodhyā, Allahabad, the Naimiṣāraṇya forest, Old Delhi, New Delhi, and then on to Vṛndāvana. The idea is to reach Vṛndāvana by November of '86, in time for Śrīla Prabhupāda's disappearance-day memorial.

Then from there we will begin a ten-year pada-yātrā, returning in 1996 for Śrīla Prabhupāda's centennial appearance anniversary festival. This way, those devotees who could not join the present pada-yātrā will still have the oppportunity to go on pada-yātrā. If my Godbrothers approve and support this plan, it will not be too difficult to achieve. It would largely depend on the leaders' realizing the enormous potential of this program for spreading Kṛṣṇa consciousness. The best way to get that realization—the only way, in fact—is to participate in it for a while and experience firsthand the preaching and purifying potency of the pada-yātrā program.

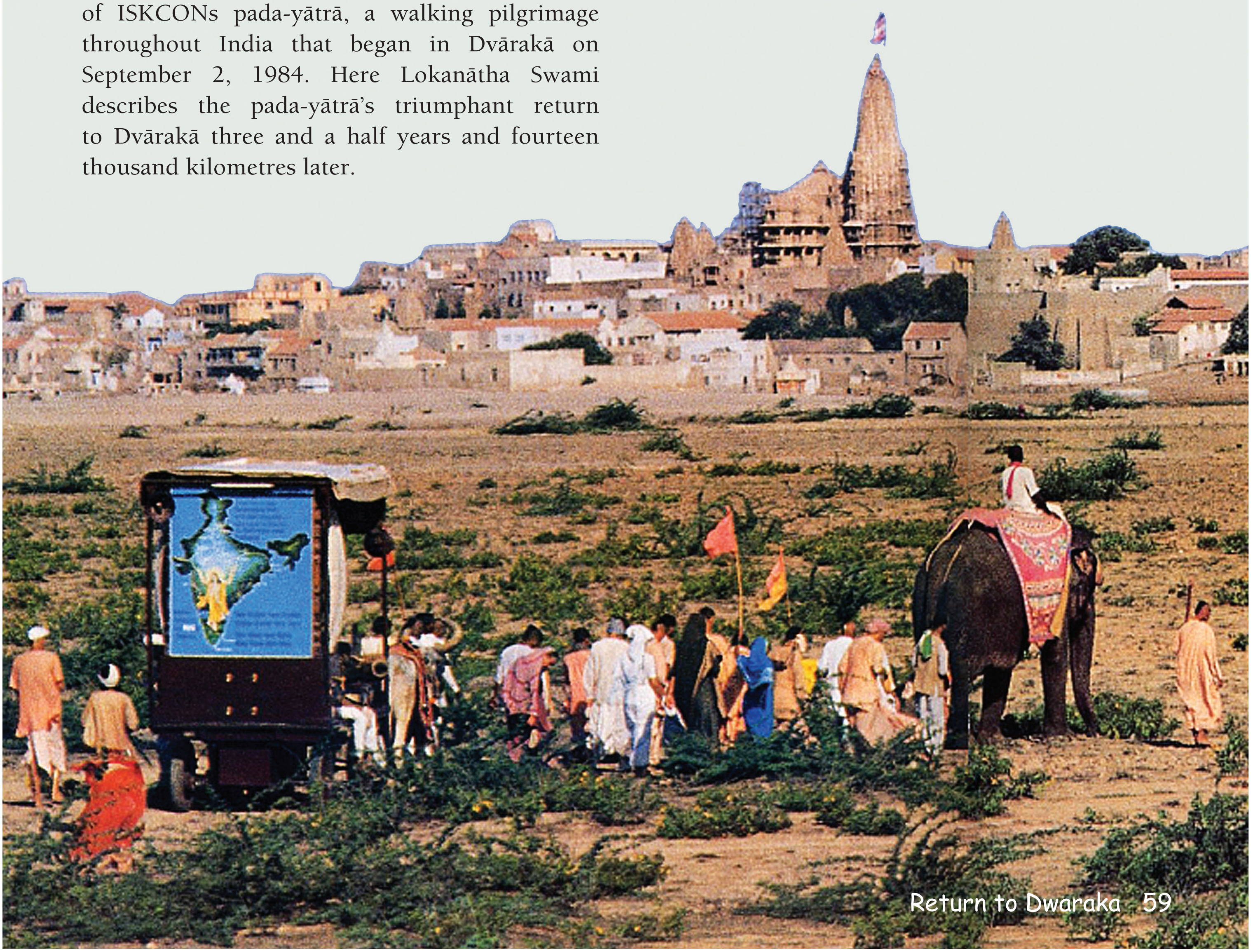
RETURN TO DWARAKA

At the site of Kṛṣṇa's ancient-city-by the Sea, devotees celebrate the triumph of Śrīla Prabhupāda's saṅkīrtana Pada-yatra.

Lokanātha Swami, a native of India's Maharashtra province, is the chief organiser of ISKCONs pada-yātrā, a walking pilgrimage throughout India that began in Dvārakā on September 2, 1984. Here Lokanātha Swami describes the pada-yātrā's triumphant return to Dvārakā three and a half years and fourteen thousand kilometres later.

MARCH 17 ARRIVAL

The pada-yātrā party has stopped at a small farm for breakfast and Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam class. Anticipation fills the air as we wait for the visiting devotees to arrive. More than one hundred devotees from all over the world are traveling



from ISKCON's annual festival in Vṛndāvana to take part in the padayatra's "Return to Dvārakā" festival.

Two large buses pull up, and the highway suddenly becomes a sea of saffron and white as the devotees spill out of the buses to offer their obeisances to our pada-yātrā deities of Śrī Śrī Gaura-Nitāi (Caitanya Mahāprabhu and Nityānanda) and Śrīla Prabhupāda. Newcomers to pada-yātrā are pleased to see the pada-yātrā cart, the bullock carts, and the pada-yātrīs the devotees who have been walking on this pilgrimage through holy India. Those who have been with us before are feeling nostalgia, meeting again with pada-yātrā acquaintances and reminiscing about their pada-yātrā experiences.

With ecstatic kīrtana, we walk to the next village, where we are warmly received by the local people. Many devotees spend the night with the pada-yātrā, and the others travel by bus to Dvārakā, ending their two-day journey, from Vṛndāvana.

Throughout, the evening devotees pour into Dvārakā: The pada-yātrā organisers, having prepared for the arrival of two hundred devotees, are surprised to see the number swell to almost four hundred. The bazaars are teeming with ISKCON members from around the world.

Dvārakā is one of the most important pilgrimage spots in India. Kṛṣṇa spent one hundred years here, longer than He spent in Vṛndāvana and Mathurā combined. While at Dvārakā He married 16,108 wives, each of whom lived in an extraordinarily opulent palace. Many of Kṛṣṇa's family members, feeling intense separation from Him after He left Mathurā, came to join Him in His new kingdom. To accommodate everyone, Lord Kṛṣṇa borrowed land from the sea to build more palaces.

Modern-day Dvārakā is a small city with an area of sixteen square miles and a population of around thirty thousand. Situated on the Arabian Sea, the city has a climate that is temperate and salubrious.

March 18

This morning, after a joyful maṅgala-ārati at the dharma-śālā hosting the visiting devotees, we make our way with kīrtana to the Samudra Nārāyaṇa temple, at the confluence of the Gomati River and the Arabian Sea. There is a solar eclipse taking place. So, following Vedic custom, we bathe in these sacred waters before leaving to join the pada-yātrā party for the final eight-kilometre walk into Dvaraka.

The procession consists of about 150 devotees, Lakṣmī the elephant, the deities' cart, and three bullock carts. Everyone is chanting and dancing spontaneously. Śrī Śrī Gaura-Nitāi are standing majestically on Their altar, and Śrīla Prabhupāda, seated on his vyāsāsana, looks like a glorious warrior returning home from victory, his foot soldiers marching alongside.

The atmosphere created by the procession reminds us of the description of Lord Caitanya's kīrtana, as described in Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Thakura's "Aruṇodaya-kīrtana," a song usually sung in the early morning hours:

When the eastern horizon became tinged with the red that heralds the rising of the sun, the jewel among the brāhmaṇas, Lord Gaurasundara, immediately awakened. Taking His devotees with Him, He journeyed through the towns and villages of Nadia. The mṛdaṅgas resounded "tathāi, tathāi," and the karatālas in that kīrtana played in time. Lord Gaurāṅga's golden form slightly trembled in ecstatic love of Godhead, and His footbells jingled. Lord Caitanya called out to the townsfolk, "Just fill your mouths with the holy names 'Mukunda!' 'Māhdava!' 'Yādava!' and "Hari!'". As the pada-yātrā procession moves toward the city of Dvārakā, its skyline predominated by the magnificent Dvārakādhīśa temple, devotees relish chanting and dancing in the fresh, cool morning air.

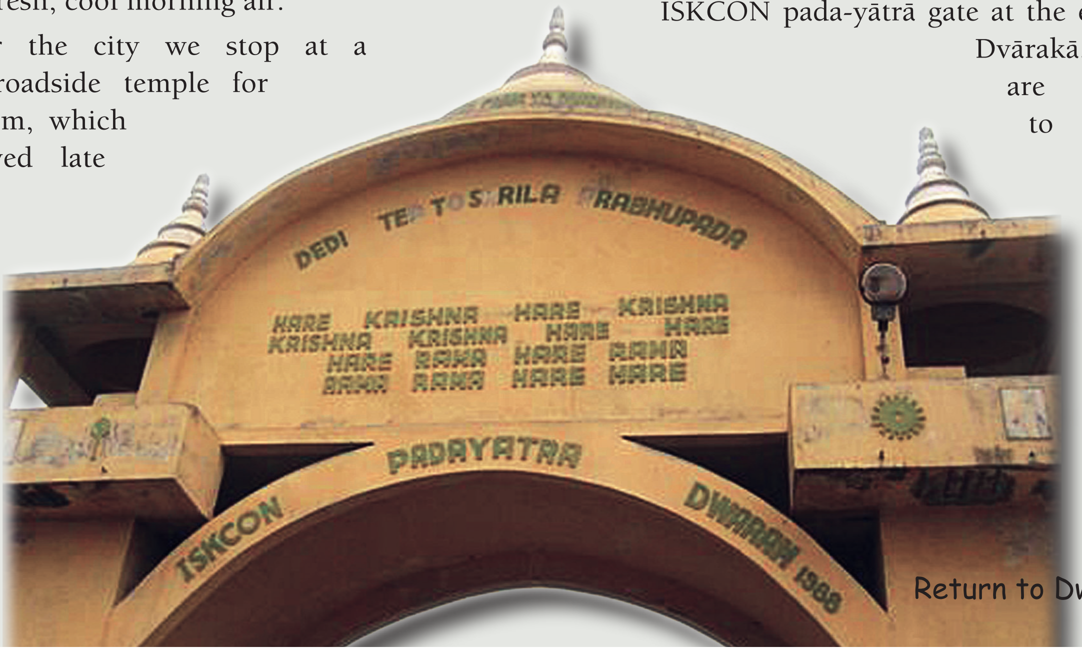
Near the city we stop at a small roadside temple for prasādam, which is served late because of the solar eclipse. The priests say that food cooked during an eclipse is considered inedible, so the cooking was delayed. While we wait for prasādam, Śrīdhara Swami speaks to us about the citizens of Dvārakā. No ordinary soul can live in Kṛṣṇa's land, he says. They are very special people, and they are warm and friendly. We should treat them with respect and give them a good impression of the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement.

Reception

The president of Dvārakā township, the head priest of the Dvārakādhīśa temple, groups of school children, school bands, and thousands of residents of Dvārakā greet us with an enthusiastic and heartwarming reception. The local people are wide-eyed to see the same devotees, with their elephant, oxen, and cart, returning to Dvārakā with the same enthusiasm with which they left three and a half years before. They treat us like family members. The local brāhmaṇas happily embrace our ISKCON brāhmaṇas. Seeing foreigners following the Vedic culture and worshiping the Deity just as they are doing inspires them in their own devotional life.

Gate Inaugural Ceremony

Within a sacrificial arena, Gaura Keśava dāsa performs a fire sacrifice to sanctify the ISKCON pada-yātrā gate at the entrance to Dvārakā. People are amazed to hear an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PADAYATRA
ISKCON
DWARAKA 1988

Australian-born brāhmaṇa chanting Vedic mantras with such accuracy. At the end of the sacrifice, firecrackers proclaim the triumphant return of Śrīla Prabhupāda's Saṅkīrtana Pada-yātrā to Dvārakā. Kīrtana surcharges the atmosphere as the procession passes through the newly opened arch.

The gate is sixty feet high and fifty feet wide. Spiral staircases inside both columns lead to viewing galleries on top. Panels depicting the life and teachings of Lord Caitanya and Śrīla Prabhupāda will be installed above the arch.

AWARDS CEREMONY

A colourful paṇḍal tent has been erected nearby. The sannyāsīs, GBCs, and kīrtana party are seated on the stage, and the rest of the devotees mingle with the audience. Leaders of several Dvārakā institutions greet us with welcoming speeches, garlands, and hari-nāma cādars from the Dvārakādhīśa temple. Amid tumultuous applause, Shri Harsibhai Kanani, the president of Dvārakā township, presents me with a certificate of appreciation for the pada-yātrā's accomplishment.

Next we honour the seven pada-yātrīs who walked the entire fourteen thousand kilometres. One by one they are called onto the stage, garlanded, and presented with a framed certificate. These souls are very special. As anyone who has spent time on pada-yātrā knows, it is not easy to carry on day after day, year after year. It takes great determination.

News reporters and radio and television crews are present throughout the proceedings, reporting everything with sincerity and intensity.

The ceremonies completed, the devotees, feeling satisfaction, make their way to the prasādam hall for a sumptuous feast of dokhlā, sabjīs, purīs, rice, chutneys, pakorās, śrīkhaṇḍa, and more. Everyone is well fed and impressed with the delicious prasādam and the efficient service.

DVARAKADHESHA DARSANA

In the evening we carry our small Gaura-Nitāi Deities to the famous Dvārakādhīśa temple. The seven-storyhigh temple is built on seventy-two pillars. From the temple dome waves an eighty four-foot-long multicolored flag decorated with the symbols of the sun and moon.

We are welcomed heartily by the temple pujārīs. They put our small Deities on the altar and offer ārati to Them. They garland the devotees, decorate their foreheads with a dot of bright red powder, and offer them mahā-prasādam.

After circumambulating the temple, we walk to the festival site for the evening programme. Several thousand people crowd around the stage, which is situated near a busy marketplace. Yaśomatīnandana dāsa introduces the ISKCON devotees from around the world to the audience. Gopāla Kṛṣṇa Goswami and other leaders speak on the philosophy of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Jagattāriṇī-devī dāsī enthralls the children and the adults alike with her puppet show and ISKCON cinema.

MARCH 19 DVARAKA-MANDALA PARIKRAMA

After maṅgala-ārati the devotees chant patiently on their beads while waiting to board the reserved buses that will take them to Island Dvārakā and Śrī Gopitallava. Unfortunately, things don't run so smoothly, and some of the buses depart too soon, leaving many devotees stranded and forcing them to take a government tourist bus. Consequently, devotees arrive on the island at different times.

Once we are all united again, we walk from the harbour up the hill toward the temple. The streets are lined with small shops selling painted shells, necklaces, postcards, framed pictures of the island and of Śrī Dvārakādhīśa, and other souvenirs. When we reach the temple, the priests request us to perform kīrtana. We begin chanting, and a local tabla player joins in, sitting right in the middle of our party. The devotees chant and dance to their hearts' content.

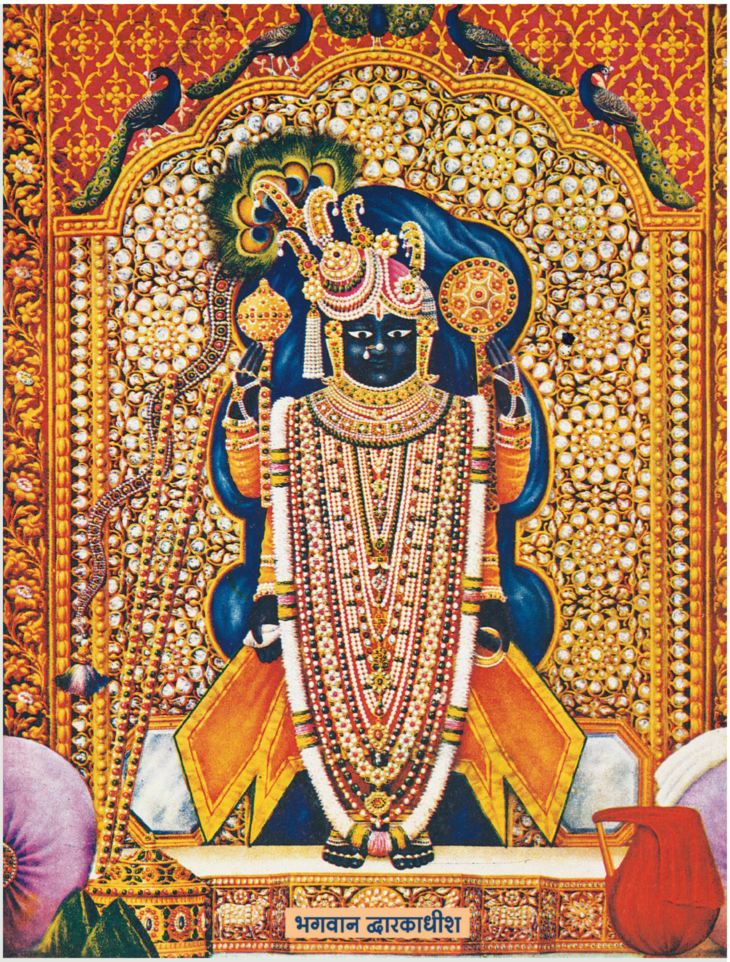
Sitting at the exact spot where Sudāmā brāhmaṇa met Lord Kṛṣṇa, I narrate some of the Lord's Dvārakā pastimes for the pleasure of the devotees.

In the temple courtyard, rows of devotees are served brakfast of Dvārakādhīśa prasādam. Then everyone returns to the mainland.

The journey, in a large wooden motorboat, takes around twenty minutes. The Arabian Sea is calm and the breezes cooling. Devotees delight in feeding the flocks of healthy-looking sea gulls that follow the boats. Gazing out across the clear blue waters, we remember how in these depths like the remains of Śrī Kṛṣṇa's own city of Dvārakā.

The gardens and parks were full of various flowers of different colors and orchards that were overloaded with a variety of fruits. Beautiful birds were chirping, and peacocks were delightfully crowing. There were tanks and ponds full of blue and red lotus flowers, and some of these sites were filled with varieties of lilies. The lakes were full of nice swans and cranes whose voices resounded everywhere. In the city there were as many as 900,000 great palaces built of first-class marble with gates and doors made of silver. The posts of the houses and palaces were bedecked with jewels such as touchstone, sapphires, and emeralds, and the floors gave off a beautiful luster. The highways, lanes and streets, crossings, and marketplaces were all beautifully decorated. The whole city was full of residential homes, assembly houses, and temples, all of different architectural beauty. All of this made Dvārakā a glowing city. (Kṛṣṇa, Vol. 2, p. 242)

India's recent marine archaeological expeditions have "discovered many unknown features of the historic city.... The inner and outer gateways of the protohistoric Dvārakā were flanked by circular bastions built of massive blocks of sandstone.... It can be said that Dvārakā was the largest port of the second millennium" (Dr. S. R. Rao, National Institute of Oceanography).



Śrī Dvārakādhīśa

While some persons choose to neglect evidence that supports the existence of Kṛṣṇa's capital city, others use the evidence to increase their faith in the scriptures that describe Dvārakā. They don't reject the scriptures as mythology.

After landing in Okha Port, we cram into the waiting buses (there never seem to enough of them), devotees piling onto the roofs and hanging out of the doors and windows. We stop at Śrī Gopitallava, where Kṛṣṇa met the gopīs when they came from Vṛndāvana to see Him. Everyone gets a chance to dig out a piece of gopīcandana (clay for decorating the forehead with the tilaka sign) to take home. We then head back to the city for evening prasādam, highlighted by tonight's piece de resistance: laḍḍus the size of tennis balls. There are more than enough for everyone.

FLAG-HOISTING CEREMONY

This evening we hold a flag-hoisting ceremony at the Dvārakādhīśa temple. In the courtyard, special mantras are chanted as a priest climbs the temple dome—flag emblazoned with “Hare Krishna” in hand—watched intently by all the devotees. The flag unfurls to the sound of uproarious cheering and tumultuous kīrtana. A devotee turns to me and says, “This is the pada-yātrā’s jaya-patāka [victory flag].”

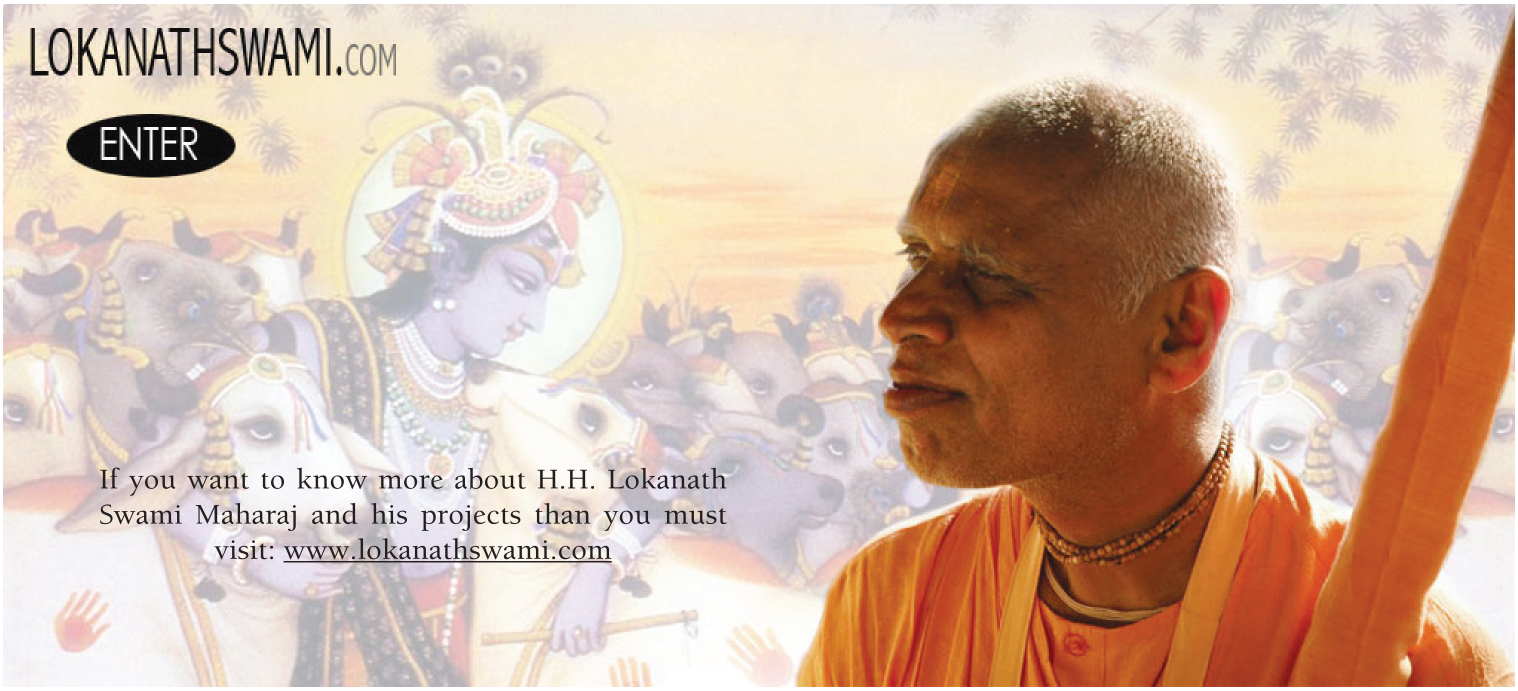
March 20, 21

Most of the visiting devotees are preparing to leave—making train or bus reservations, packing luggage, shopping, saying good-bys, packing leftover laḍḍus for the journey. Our group gradually diminishes to just the main pada-yātrā party and a handful of others who want to stay for another day or two. When we hold a meeting to discuss plans for the future of pada-yātrā, I am pleased to see some new faces of people who are interested to join us for a while.

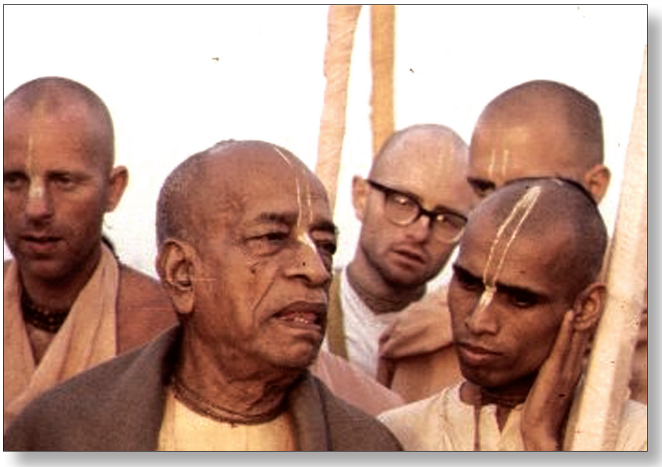
March 22

After maṅgala-ārati, the luggage carts are loaded, the oxen decorated and hitched up, and Lakṣmī the elephant stirred into action. The kīrtana party accompanies Śrī Śrī Gaura-Nitāi to the Dvārakādhīśa temple for a last darśana Then they rejoin the main pada-yātrā procession, which proceeds along the streets, through the ISKCON pada-yātrā gate, and out to the main highway. The pada-yātrā is back on the road again, heading to its next destination—Allahabad, for the Kumbha-melā in January 1989.

As we leave Dvārakā for the second time, there are fifty devotees walking with the party. It is inspiring to see that those same seven pada-yātrīs who walked the entire fourteen thousand kilometres are still with us today. Giving testimony to the transcendental nature of the pada-yātrā, these seasoned pada-yātrīs have not become tired of walking, but are even more enthusiastic and keen to carry on.



If you want to know more about H.H. Lokanath Swami Maharaj and his projects than you must visit: www.lokanathswami.com



Prabhupada Uvacha

This exchange between His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada and Lokanath Swami took place in Vṛndāvana on September 12, 1976.

Prabhupāda: I have seen, Gandhi wanted to organize a program, village [break] ...in the field, that this program for constructing toilet in the village, they have spent so much. You know that? The first business was toilet. To restrict them to pass stool here and there, they must have. Now in constructing that toilet paraphernalia, (indistinct), they... Therefore it failed, village organization. Not for that purpose. There were many purpose. Because they had no engagement, so why they should remain in the village? There are so many attraction in the city, and they get money. The factory-wallas, they're inviting, "Come here. You shall get twenty rupees per day." Why shall he remain in the village? So if you can organize in the villages, they are interested in chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra and getting nice prasādam, then... One must have some attachment. In the city there are so many artificial attachments. So on what ground they'll remain in the village? Mind, always remember this. Unless you have got some attachment, there is no possibility. Gandhi's program was very nice, village organize so that they may not come to the city and help the capitalists. Remain satisfied in the village. But where is that satisfaction? That is the failure.

Lokanātha: If they add the holy name to their lives, they will...

Prabhupāda: Yes. If they could understand that. That will be helpful if you chant. Therefore Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu's statement will never be false. *Ceto-darpaṇa-mārjanam* [Cc. Antya 20.12]. If they chant Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra, then gradually the dirty things accumulated within the heart will be cleansed. And if he comes to the understanding, clear idea, that "I want to eat something and my necessities... So if I get my necessities, primary necessities of life, and satisfaction of mind, then why shall I go to city?" That they can have very easily. If they follow the instruction of Bhagavad-gītā, that "Your first necessity is food." So produce food here. *Kṛṣi-go-rakṣya-vāṇijyam* [Bg. 18.44]. And you'll find here so much land is lying vacant. Because they have gone to the city for twenty rupees daily to manufacture Goodyear tire. And who will work here? Now I have seen in Delhi, the government is advertising, "Go back to the village." Rascal, you are manufacturing wine and keeping them engaged whole day in the work. So after being tired, he requires some wine. And why he'll go? And no spiritual education, no cleanliness. Simply inviting "Go to the village" they will go?

Lokanātha: Just a propaganda.

Prabhupāda: No, they're thinking that so many people are coming to the cities, how we shall provide them? That's a problem. After all government has to supply them rations. Where is so much foodstuff? And if they are not supplied, then there will be resentment. That's a fact. What they are doing in the city, so many scooter (makes motor sound), going here and there. Actually no engagement. The girls are loitering in the street by dressing. It will become more and more problems, city life. So this is the solution, that they must go back to the village. But they are trained up to enjoy the facilities, so-called facilities, of the city. They are not going to village. But if we can introduce this hari-saṅkīrtana, and if they have little taste, that is success. It's a great program. And that taste will come *ceto-darpaṇa-mārjanam* [Cc. Antya 20.12]. If he simply becomes little sober that "I want to eat, I have to sleep, I want some sense enjoyment and defense. So if I can get easily in the village, why shall I go three hundred miles away? Just keep in mind the psychology. So that simple life will be possible if one is bhakta. *Bhaktiḥ pareśānubhavo viraktir anyatra syāt* [SB 11.2.42]. Only by devotion. Not by otherwise. Not by artificial means, by manufacturing toilet. Only bhakti. If they get little attachment for Kṛṣṇa the questions will be solved automatically. And they will be happy. Undoubtedly. That is the Caitanya Mahāprabhu's first instruction. *Ceto-darpaṇa*.

Lokanātha: I come from village, and I'm happy now as I have taken to holy name and prasāda. So more, other villagers... Half of these boys are from villages?

Prabhupāda: Yes, they are villagers.

Lokanātha: They're chanting and they're so happy and they're going back to village.

Prabhupāda: Very good life. Very good life. The village life. Provided he has got proper engagement. Otherwise his mind will be disturbed, and he'll seek after wine, after women, after this, after that. Devil's workshop.

Caraṇāravindam: Because there's no sacrifice, because people aren't performing sacrifices now, is it more difficult to live off the land? It is more difficult to grow vegetables in Kali-yuga where there's no sacrifice?

Prabhupāda: What is that sacrifice?

Caraṇāravindam: Chanting. Chanting the holy name. Doesn't that make it more difficult to live? The weather's, everything's so disturbed?

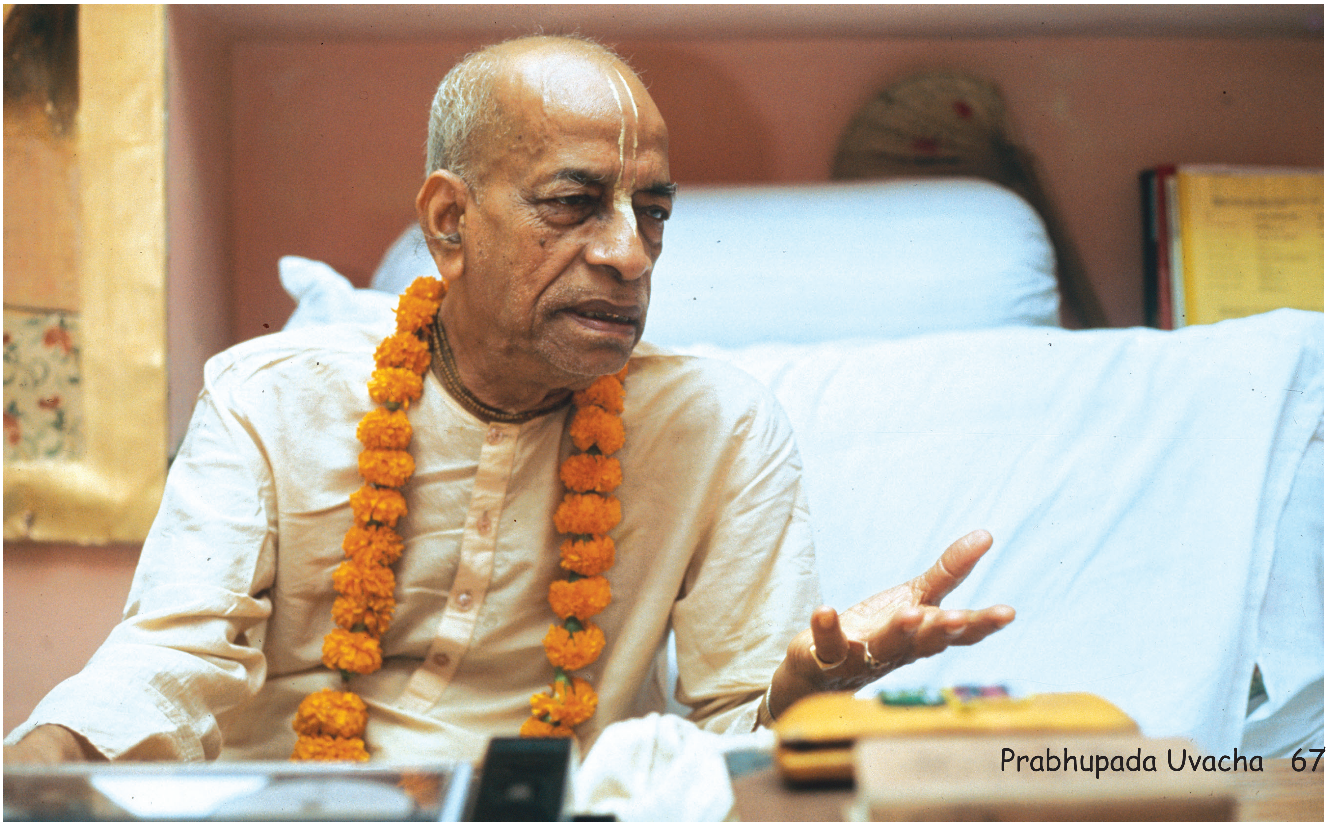
Prabhupāda: Whether you're not eating?

Lokanātha: He says there is no *yajña*, sacrifice, people are not performing, that is why they are into the trouble.

Prabhupāda: This is *yajña. Yajñaiḥ saṅkīrtana-prāyair yajanti hi su-medhasaḥ* [SB 11.5.32]. Su-medhasaḥ. Those who have got brain substance, they perform this saṅkīrtana-yajña. Those who have cow dung, they cannot. One who has got brain substance. *Yajñaiḥ saṅkīrtana-prāyair yajanti hi su-medhasaḥ*. And *alpa-medhasa*. The two words.

Lokanātha: Nobody outside ISKCON does this kīrtana.

Prabhupāda: What do they know? What they'll do? All rascals, fools.



Lokanātha: Even some religious organizations are there but nobody...

Prabhupāda: They do not know what is religion. They do not know what is religion. They have no faith in God. This is their position. All bogus. I say it, challenging, do they know what is God?

Lokanātha: You have said many times you could give complete address of Kṛṣṇa.

Prabhupāda: Yes we give address.

Lokanātha: And also we know the telephone number.

Prabhupāda: Yes.

Lokanātha: Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa.

Prabhupāda: (Hindi) That is God is great. Nobody can defeat Him. Nobody can go beyond Him. Asama-ūrdhva. Nobody is equal to Him. Asama, ūrdhva. Nobody is greater than Him, nobody is equal to Him. That is God. And after there are so many Gods, everyone God. So what kind of God? If God has a competitor, then what is the God? God has no competitor. *Asama-ūrdhva*. Everyone is down. *Asama*. Not equal, not *ūrdhva*. Then down. Two things, three things are there. Equal, level, upper and lower. So there is no upper and there is no equal. Then all lower. Then He's the supreme controller. *Īśvara parama*. In the lower level there may be *īśvara*. But they are not *parama*. Subordinate.

Lokanātha: *Ekale īśvara kṛṣṇa āra saba bhṛtya* [Cc. Ādi 5.142].

Prabhupāda: *Āra saba bhṛtya*. God is one and all others, they are subjects. *Nityo nityānām*. Why these two words are used, *nityānām*. Everyone is nitya, but He's the supreme *nitya*. *Cetanaś cetanānām*. He's not dead body, dead matter. Cetana. *Nityam*, just as the Himalaya *parvata* is standing forever. No. Cetana. Living. So how He can be imperson? Himalaya *parvata* may be very big, the sky may be big, but it is not *cetana*. Therefore this word is used. *Cetana*, living. *Nityo nityānāṁ cetanaś cetanānām* (Kaṭha Upaniṣad 2.2.13). What is the difference? *Eko bahūnāṁ vidadhāti kāmān*. That one *nitya* is providing, maintaining all other nityas. That is God. God is great. That is the meaning. So anyway, make your effort sincerely. The basic principle is this. Induce them to chant and take prasāda. You'll be successful. Not very much ostādi. (Hindi)

Lokanātha: So we'll write to you, (indistinct) books.

Prabhupāda: Yes. Go to village to village. It is very noble attempt. And if you sincerely preach Kṛṣṇa will... *buddhi-yogaṁ dadāmi taṁ yena mām upayānti te*. There is no doubt.

Indian man: (Sanskrit verse)

Lokanātha: He joined us four days back. He's from Maharastra. I'm taking him with me.

Prabhupāda: He understands the philosophy. Wherefrom it is quoted?

Indian boy: (Hindi)

Lokanātha: Saint Tukārāma.

Prabhupāda: Oh, Saint Tukārāma. He's a great saint. He is Māyāvādī or Vaiṣṇava?

Lokanātha: Tukārāma is Vaiṣṇava.

Prabhupāda: Oh! Tukārāma is Vaiṣṇava.

Lokanātha: But this is different. Tukārāma met Caitanya Mahāprabhu at Mylapur(?).

Prabhupāda: Yes. Tukārāma is a disciple of Caitanya Mahāprabhu. Then it is in order. What is the...

Indian man: (Recites Sanskrit)

Lokanātha: It's a very nice question.

Prabhupāda: Hare Kṛṣṇa. Jaya. (Hindi) "By My order." That's all. That I was explaining to Mr. Gupta. If I say this bag of bead, you take it and give it to him, then where is my difficulty? There is no difficulty. This is called beadbag. You take it and give him. And you become guru. Call a spade a spade. And if you become ostāda, Kurukṣetra means this body and this means this, and this means that," then you spoil. You spoil yourself.

The Saint who Walked Amongst Us

Hare kṛṣṇa devotees all over the world are getting ready to celebrate the centennial of Śrīla Prabhupāda. His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda appeared* on September 1, 1896, in a family of Vaiṣṇavas (Kṛṣṇa devotees) in Calcutta, India. He was destined to become the Founder-Ācārya of the International Society for Kṛṣṇa Consciousness.

Soon after Śrīla Prabhupāda appeared, an astrologer foretold that at the age of seventy he would travel across the ocean as a great religious teacher and establish 108 temples. True to this prediction, at the age of sixty-nine he embarked for America in pursuance of the order of his spiritual master, Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvat” Ṭhākura. In New York in July 1966, after a year of struggle, penniless and without support, Śrīla Prabhupāda founded ISKCON, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness.

Śrīla Prabhupāda deeply realized the teachings of the ācāryas (spiritual masters) who had preceded him, and he presented their teachings suitably for the people of modern times. The eighty books he wrote will serve as a source of inspiration and guidance for generations of devotees. Even now, these writings are the law books of the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement.

With unwavering devotion, courage, and compassion, Prabhupāda brought the essence of Vedic culture—Kṛṣṇa consciousness—beyond the borders of India and spread it throughout the world.

THE CENTENNIAL CAMPAIGN

As 1996, the year of Śrīla Prabhupāda's Centennial, draws closer, Śrīla Prabhupāda's disciples, grand-disciples, friends and well-wishers want to take this opportunity to unite to glorify him and further distribute his teachings. For this they have launched a worldwide "Centennial Campaign."

This year, ISKCON devotees are focusing on the upcoming celebration. In many parts of India the campaign has been formally inaugurated by government officers and other prominent people. In 1996 the celebrations will extend throughout the year. Some of the events to take place that year will become annual. The centennial celebrations will serve as a sort of gateway through which the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement can enter the twenty-first century.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION

More than simply a celebration, the Centennial can serve as an occasion on which all devotees can work together to strengthen Śrīla Prabhupāda's movement. So the Śrīla Prabhupāda Centennial has evolved into a multi-faceted event. Plans for the celebrations have taken the shape of a colorful many-petaled lotus, each petal representing one aspect of the centennial campaign. (See inside front cover.)

Here are some of the major centennial projects undertaken so far.

THREE MAGNIFICENT TEMPLES

Amongst the most prominent offerings with which ISKCON wishes to honor Śrīla Prabhupāda are several majestic temple complexes the size of Hare Krishna Land in Bombay. The new temples—at Delhi, Bangalore, and Ahmedabad—will include guest houses and Vedic museums. Construction is in full swing at all three sites. The temples are due to open in 1996.

1,000 LIBRARIES

By 1996 the Bhaktivedanta Archives plans to establish 1,000 Bhaktivedanta Libraries. The libraries, to be set up in schools, temples, and the homes of devotees, will each consist of a full set of Śrīla Prabhupāda's books and all the available tapes and videos of Śrīla Prabhupāda. By June 1994, four hundred such libraries had already been established.

MEMORIALS, GOLD COINS, AND COMMEMORATIVE STAMPS

The South African government mint will produce a gold coin bearing Śrīla Prabhupāda's image. In India and several other countries, devotees are working for the issuance of Centennial commemorative postal stamps. Devotees plan to install monuments and memorial plaques in places Śrīla Prabhupāda visited and in major holy places in India. In Bombay, Vṛndāvana, Warangal, and several other places, devotees plan to erect permanent memorial gates.

PADAYATRA IN 100 COUNTRIES

For Śrīla Prabhupāda's pleasure, devotees plan to organize Padayātrās (walking festivals) in one hundred countries. By the end of 1994, fifty countries had taken part. Centennial Padayātrās will also walk throughout India. And in 1996 the Padayātrā that started in Dvārakā twelve years earlier will have traveled fifty thousand kilometers on its uninterrupted pilgrimage to spread Kṛṣṇa consciousness around the Indian subcontinent.

DISTRIBUTION OF BOOKS

As a special offering to Śrīla Prabhupāda, many devotees who usually do not distribute books will join the regular distributors. We hope to distribute Kṛṣṇa conscious books in quantities never seen before. And we hope to stay in touch with people who receive the books to give them further opportunities to understand Śrīla Prabhupāda's message.

STRENGTHENING ISKCON

In 1996, we want to offer Prabhupāda a still stronger and more closely united Society. To this end, we are compiling a database of all initiated devotees. And we are planning reunions and an international newsletter to bring devotees closer to Kṛṣṇa and closer to one another. Several years ago, devotees with experience in business and other professions formed the ISKCON Foundation to help support ISKCON and offer guidance to strengthen its management. As part of the Centennial programs, the Foundation will organize training seminars to help temples achieve excellence in temple management.

WRITING DOWN WHAT SRILA PRABHUPADA DID

Some devotees are writing books of their memories of Śrīla Prabhupāda. Others are compiling accounts of what Śrīla Prabhupāda did in different parts of the world. By 1996 we hope to have published accounts of Śrīla Prabhupāda's activities in France, Italy, Canada, Malaysia, Australia, and places in India such as Delhi, Bombay, and Vṛndāvana.

OTHER NEW BOOKS

Devotees plan to publish a high-quality book of photographs of all the ISKCON temples in the world and a fully illustrated edition of Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam for children. Other devotees plan to publish manuals giving Śrīla Prabhupāda's instructions for painters, for his women disciples, and so on. Grand Bathing Ceremony

(Sahasra Kalāśa Mahā-abhiṣeka)

In Calcutta, September 6, 1996, the actual anniversary of Śrīla Prabhupāda's appearance, the sculptured form of Śrīla Prabhupāda will be bathed with holy waters collected from 1,008 sacred rivers, ponds, confluences, and estuaries in India. Similar ceremonies, on a smaller scale,

will be held at every ISKCON center.

PERSONAL OFFERINGS

Some devotees are pledging offerings that pertain to their own spiritual development and purification. Some are learning one hundred verses from Vedic literature. Others are increasing their chanting of Hare Kṛṣṇa. Some have even pledged to get rid of one hundred inner contaminations!

1996 EVENTS WORLDWIDE

The 1996 calendar of Centennial events includes traveling festivals, academic conferences, a World Feast Day, and a special "Śrīla Prabhupāda Marathon" for distribution of Śrīla Prabhupāda's books (devotees hope to beat all previous records).

EVENTS IN INDIA

Apart from the celebrations already mentioned, in India a traveling festival will hold programs in twenty-five towns and cities. In Calcutta the Bhaktivedanta Institute will sponsor, in Śrīla Prabhupāda's honor, a six-day gathering of scientists, religious leaders, and scholars—the Conference for the Synthesis of Science and Religion. In February and March, thousands of devotees will gather at ISKCON's center in Māyāpur, West Bengal, for a Hare Kṛṣṇa World Convention. And in October/November devotees will hold the grand openings for the new ISKCON temples in Delhi, Bangalore, and Ahmedabad.

BE A PART OF IT!

The success of the celebration depends on how much energy we put into getting ready for it. Our goal is to involve everyone. All the followers of Śrīla Prabhupāda can take part: everyone who practices Kṛṣṇa consciousness, or reads Śrīla Prabhupāda's books, or in any way appreciates him—any man, woman, or child.

Our plans for Śrīla Prabhupāda's Centennial won't be accomplished by temple devotees alone. We are depending on all Śrīla Prabhupāda's followers and admirers to step forward. The Centennial offers an opportunity for everyone to serve Śrīla Prabhupāda. It is an occasion through which we can all show our love for him by working together to spread Kṛṣṇa consciousness all over the world.

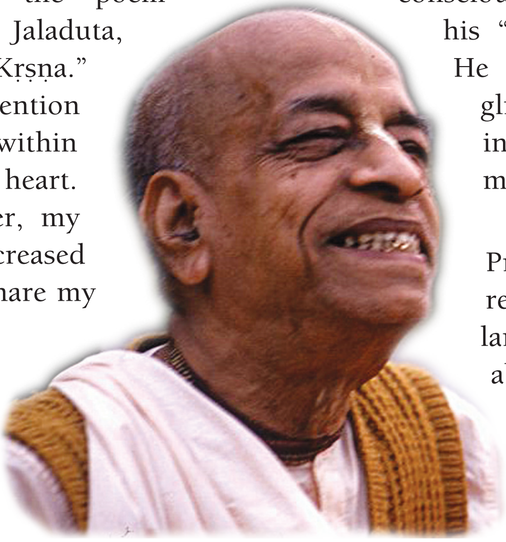
Śrīla Prabhupāda has glorified Kṛṣṇa so much, so now Kṛṣṇa wants to glorify him. Unseen, Kṛṣṇa is at the top of the Centennial Campaign, overseeing all the arrangements to honor His pure devotee.

Everyone, get involved! It is time to come forward and celebrate together. Kṛṣṇa wants you to glorify Śrīla Prabhupāda. And while we attempt to glorify Śrīla Prabhupāda, we also purify ourselves.

All glories to our ever well-wisher, His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda. He lives forever, and his followers live with him.

Magnanimous He Came to Us

"If you want to know me, read my books," said Śrīla Prabhupāda. I found this instruction completely true recently while reading the poem Prabhupāda wrote onboard the Jaladuta, "Prayer to the Lotus Feet of Kṛṣṇa." This rare prayer caught my attention and took me on a voyage deep within the core of Śrīla Prabhupāda's heart. As I repeatedly read the prayer, my appreciation of Prabhupāda increased a thousandfold. I now wish to share my reflections with you.



On Monday, September 13, 1965, the thirty-second day of Śrīla Prabhupāda's journey from Calcutta, Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote in his diary that after midnight the ship's lurching had decreased and he felt relief. Just a few days before, he had suffered a violent heart attack. Later that day, sitting by himself in his cabin, in full Kṛṣṇa consciousness he disclosed his mind to his "companion," Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa. He wrote in Bengali, giving a glimpse of his life and mission in an amazingly straightforward manner.

In the prayer, Śrīla Prabhupāda's true nature is revealed. He has not even landed in America, yet he talks about spreading the name of Lord Gaurāṅga (Caitanya Mahāprabhu) in all cities, towns, and villages of the earth. He says confidently that everyone will chant the holy name of Kṛṣṇa. In every word, he expresses complete loyalty and faithfulness to guru and Gaurāṅga, praising his spiritual master, Śrī Śrīmad Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura, as a great saintly spiritual master, who bestows intense devotion to Kṛṣṇa in different places throughout the world. In the refrain, kṛṣṇa taba puṇya habe bhāi, he emphatically invokes Lord Kṛṣṇa's good fortune for all.

Śrīla Prabhupāda then expresses his boundless compassion: "When all the sinful, miserable living entities become happy, the Vaiṣṇavas' desire is fulfilled." A statement of his humility follows—his guru has ordered him to accomplish this mission, but he considers himself unworthy and unfit to do it. Turning to his companion, Śrī Kṛṣṇa ("the wisest and most experienced of all"), Prabhupāda begs for His mercy—the power to serve his guru and make his life successful.

The prayer intensifies towards the end: "If today the chance to meet You occurs again, then I will surely be able to rejoin You." But despite Prabhupāda's words in the ecstasy of separation, one gets the feeling that he is with Kṛṣṇa face to face. That is not all. He also talks of how he is looking forward to wandering about in the pastures and fields of Vṛndāvana. "Oh, when will that day be mine?" And in a mood of complete dependence and helplessness he concludes, tumi binā anya gati nāi, "O Lord Kṛṣṇa, except for You, there is no other means of success."

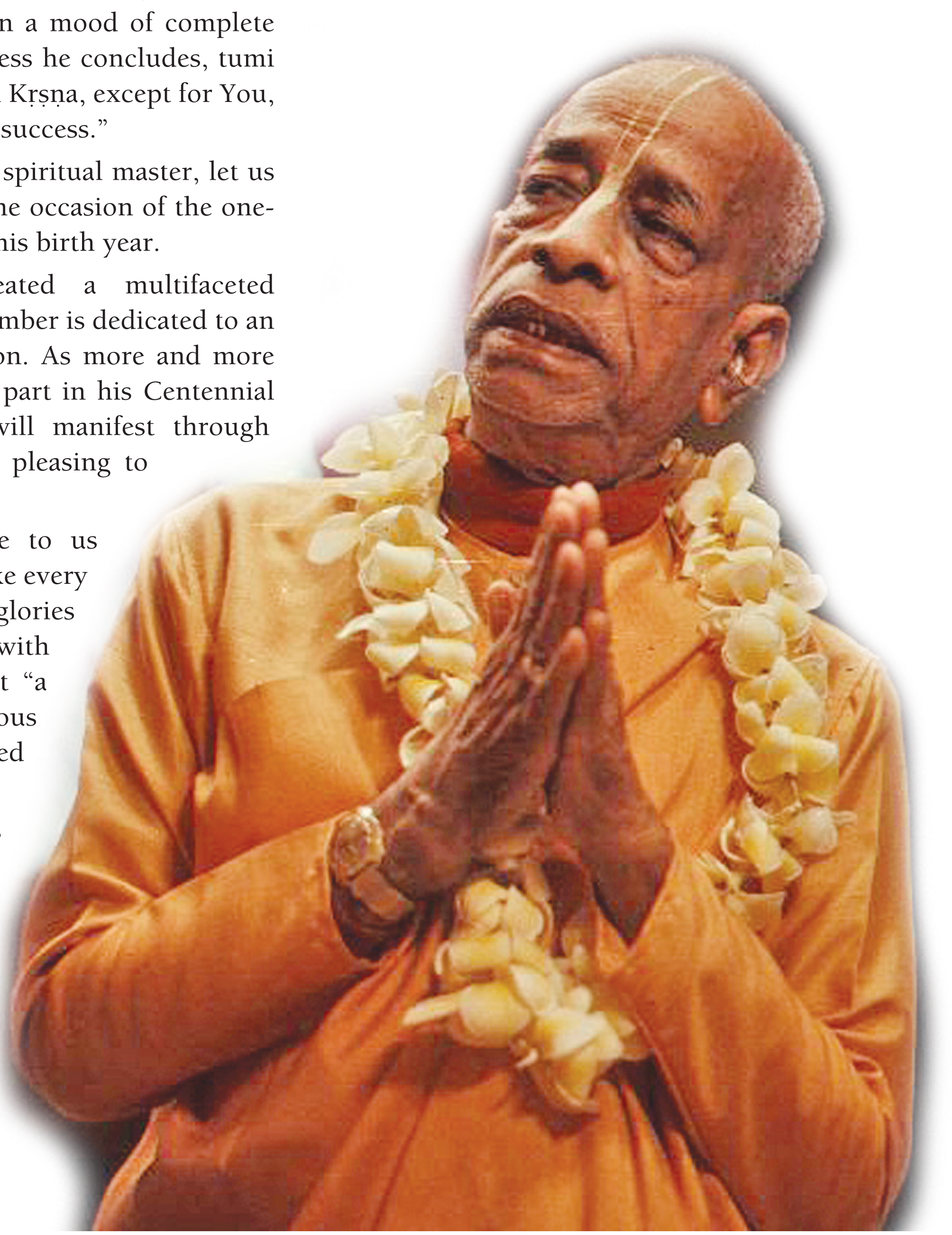
Unto such a wonderful spiritual master, let us offer befitting tribute on the occasion of the one-hundredth anniversary of his birth year.

Śrīla Prabhupāda created a multifaceted society, in which every member is dedicated to an aspect of his broad mission. As more and more devotees and friends take part in his Centennial celebration, his glories will manifest through myriad activities, all very pleasing to him.

Śrīla Prabhupāda came to us out of his mercy. Let us take every opportunity to spread his glories and continue his mission, with the aim of bringing about "a revolution in the impious lives of the misdirected civilization."

The Centennial Year was launched with a series of inaugural functions in December and January. As this issue of Back to Godhead reaches your hands, we'll probably be about halfway though the first Global Centennial Event—the Hare Kṛṣṇa World Convention in India. Our next step is to prepare for upcoming summer events: the Global Padayātrā Week, World Holy Name Day, and the largest continental summer festivals ever held in Europe, CIS, and North America. Let us also get ready to offer Śrīla Prabhupāda an unprecedented ceremony—the bathing of his transcendental body with the sacred waters from 1,008 holy places.

May his fame spread all over the three worlds!



Krishna
Wants to Glorify Srila Prabhupada

MEMORIES OF THE Centennial Year inauguration in Mumbai (Bombay) are still fresh in my mind. We were expecting up to 10,000 people, which seemed a lot. But Kṛṣṇa surprised us all—30,000 turned up. The many prominent citizens of Mumbai in attendance obviously came not for entertainment or free prasādam but to honor Śrīla Prabhupāda, who was surely pleased by the attendance.

We had predicted an audience of 10,000 by estimating what percentage of people would respond to the invitations we sent out. But Lord Kṛṣṇa, wanting to expand the glories of His pure devotee Śrīla Prabhupāda, set His own communication channel going and inspired people from within their hearts to attend the function.

Seeing the city's leading stadium jam-packed with Mumbai's elite, and witnessing their overwhelming response to the lectures and programs, I became further convinced: Kṛṣṇa wants to glorify Śrīla Prabhupāda. We had been emphasizing this point throughout the four-year Centennial campaign, and Kṛṣṇa proved it. Kṛṣṇa is known as bhaktānāma māna vardhanaḥ, "He who enhances the reputation of His devotees."

SUCCESS DEPENDS ON KRSNA

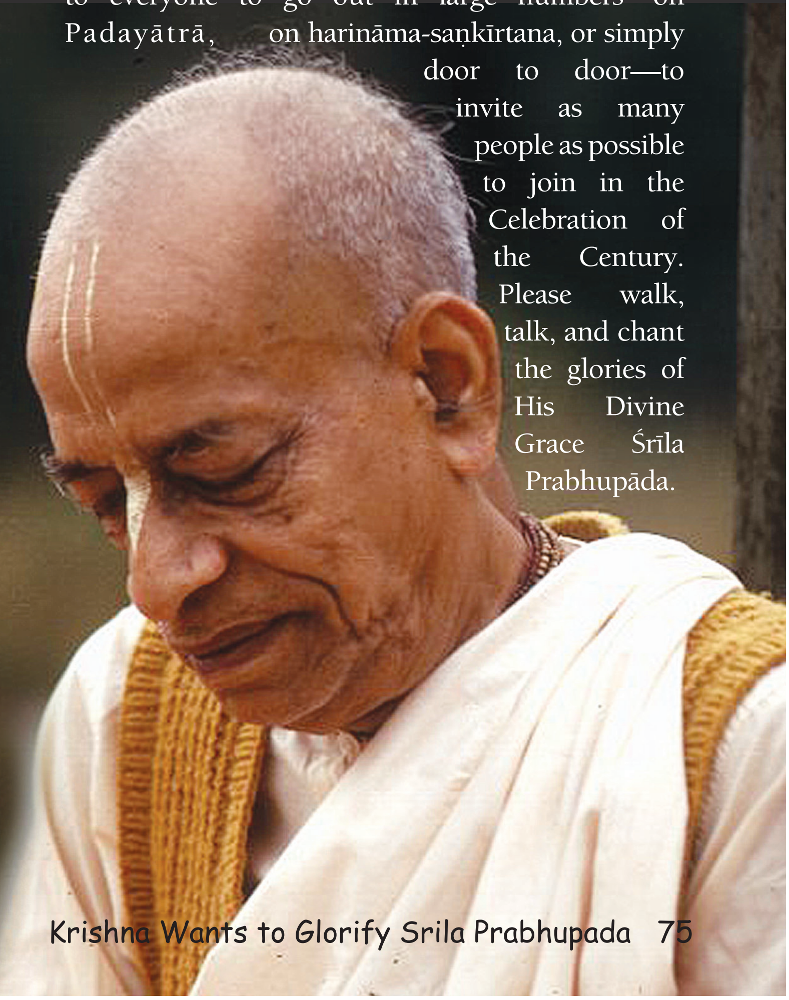
After the triumphant start of the Centennial, we feel more confident that our endeavor to glorify Śrīla Prabhupāda throughout 1996 will be a grand success. The Supreme Personality of Godhead, Kṛṣṇa, is party to the Centennial celebration. In fact, He is at the very top of the Centennial organizational tree. The success of the Centennial celebration depends on Him.

Sometimes the public glorifies unqualified people and becomes victimized by ignorant and unscrupulous so-called leaders. It is said about mundane name and fame, "Name, fame, glory—same old story!" But this saying does not apply to the fame of a pure devotee of the Lord. Śrīla Prabhupāda's fame, an integral part of his spiritual opulence in relationship with Kṛṣṇa, is eternal and ever increasing. Śrīla Prabhupāda is meant to be famous throughout the whole world, like devotees mentioned in Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, such as Dhruva Mahārāja and Bhakta Prahlāda.

TAKE THE OPPORTUNITY

The Centennial year is a great time to introduce to the whole world Śrīla Prabhupāda and his life and mission. So let us all take seriously this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and wholeheartedly glorify Śrīla Prabhupāda.

By the time this issue of BTG reaches your hands, you must all be getting ready for the next Global Events of the Centennial—Padayātrā Week and World Holy Name Day—to take place in the beginning of June. So we would like to appeal to everyone to go out in large numbers—on Padayātrā, on harināma-saṇkīrtana, or simply door to door—to invite as many people as possible to join in the Celebration of the Century. Please walk, talk, and chant the glories of His Divine Grace Śrīla Prabhupāda.



The Four-Year Camp

We are halfway through the Centennial year, and much has happened to increase consciousness of Śrīla Prabhupāda and bring him and his teachings to the notice of the world. Still, there is much more to happen this year, including Prabhupāda's Mahā Vyāsa-pūjā (Appearance Day celebration), Feed the World Day, World Enlightenment Day, and a series of events in India around the month of Kārtika (October-November).

Centennial celebrations are thriving in many parts of the world. While reading a report sent to me by Śrutakīrti Dāsa, the temple president of ISKCON Durban, I felt that the Centennial team's four years of planning and hard work had been worth the effort. In his report, written in April, Śrutakīrti told of upcoming Centennial events in Durban and South Africa:

Nṛsiṁhadeva Festival, in May.

Will focus on Śrīla Prabhupāda's introduction of the worship of Lord Nṛsiṁhadeva. Ten thousand people expected.

World Holy Name Day, June 6.

A series of harināmas [chanting festivals] around the country, starting in the provincial capital of Pietermaritzburg, then on to other cities, culminating in Africa's biggest harināma ever, in Durban.

Śrīla Prabhupāda's Appearance Day celebrations. Expected attendance: 100,000.

Feed the World Day, in November. Dubbed by the mayor as "Feed Durban for One Day."

Rathayātrā, in December. Goal: half a million plates of prasādam.

Śrutakīrti also reported that more than 250 devotees in South Africa had pledged to distribute one Kṛṣṇa conscious book a day this year.

aign Was Worth It

Confidential Servant of the Lord

Śrīla prabhupāda appeared in this world just a day after the celebration of Lord Kṛṣṇa's appearance day. We followers of Śrīla Prabhupāda's see this as a sign of his intimate relationship with the Lord. The Vedic literature teaches us that because a spiritual master such as Śrīla Prabhupāda is the Lord's most confidential servant, we must honor him as much as we honor the Supreme Lord Himself. We are therefore honoring Śrīla Prabhupāda throughout his Centennial Year and especially on the 100th anniversary of his appearance day.

Śrīla Prabhupāda often said, "I am not God, and you are not God, but we are eternal servants of God." Although we are all servants of God, most of us have forgotten our positions. Prabhupāda, however, was a self-realized servant of the Lord, as we can understand by examining the selfless work he performed on behalf of the Lord.

In Bhagavad-gītā (4.8) Lord Kṛṣṇa says, "To deliver the pious and to annihilate the miscreants, as well as to reestablish the principles of religion, I Myself appear, millennium after millennium." Śrīla Prabhupāda writes in his purport to this verse that the Lord sometimes comes to earth Himself and sometimes sends His empowered representatives to carry out His mission. Let us briefly consider Śrīla Prabhupāda's contributions to the Lord's mission on the earth.

To Deliver The Pious

To shelter pious and sincere souls, Śrīla Prabhupāda founded the International Society for Krishna Consciousness. The Society's schools, farms, and temples are spiritual oases that give relief to faithful devotees in the desert of material existence. And the different aspects of the Society such as Deity worship, Food for Life, congregational chanting, and spiritual festivals are meant to revive the devotion of pious souls and prepare them to return to the spiritual kingdom of the Lord.

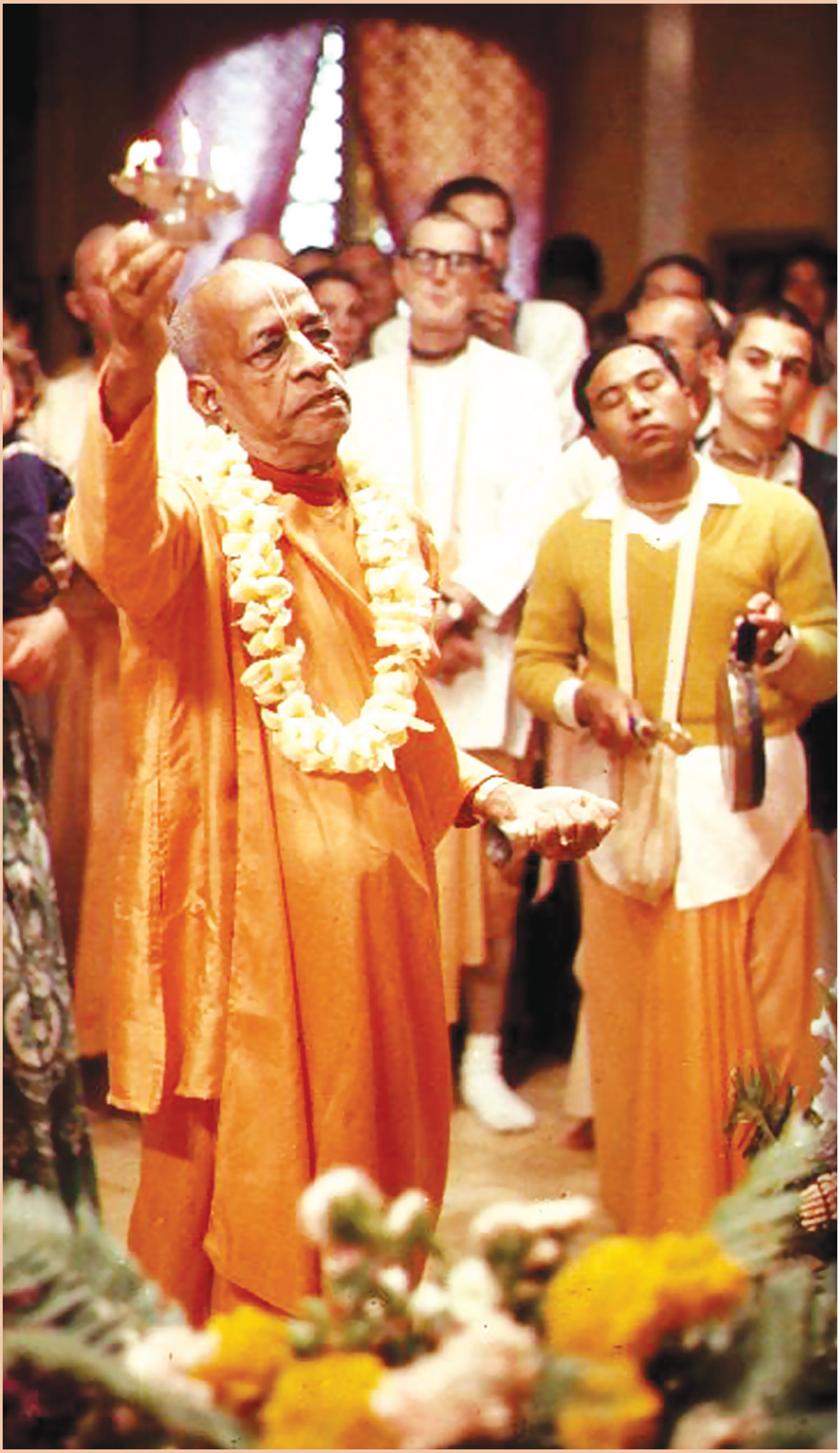
To Annihilate the Miscreants

Following in the footsteps of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, Śrīla Prabhupāda worked to curb down the demoniac tendencies of the people of this age. Prabhupāda spoke out strongly against anything or anyone opposed to Kṛṣṇa consciousness. His words were razor sharp, his books bombs smashing illusion. His Bhaktivedanta purports will continue to devastate atheistic opponents for thousand of years to come.

To Reestablish The Principles of Religion

Real religion is one: to serve the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Śrīla Prabhupāda translated bhakti not just as "devotion" but as "devotional service," to emphasize that devotional service is the eternal occupation of all living entities.

Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu introduced the main process of devotional service for the present age: the chanting of the holy names of the Lord. Lord Caitanya spread the holy names within India. And Śrīla Prabhupāda said that Lord Caitanya had left to the International Society for Krishna Consciousness the job of spreading the holy names to the rest of the world. When Prabhupāda first came to America, he chanted by himself in New York City. Later, he encouraged his disciples to chant and dance through the streets of cities all over the world.



The Best Welfare Program

During a talk at a Christian monastery in 1972, Śrīla Prabhupāda said, "*When I started this movement I was cooking and distributing prasādam. . . . We invite everyone, 'Please come here, chant the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra, dance with us, and when you are hungry take some food. We are prepared to give you.' So our program is very easy. Actually these boys and girls were not advised in the beginning to become my initiated students. I simply invited, 'You please come.' I was chanting in Tompkins Square Park in New York, and many of them were coming. So I invited them, 'Please come with me. Take some prasādam.' So they used to take that. In this way, gradually, they developed their Kṛṣṇa consciousness, and after some time they proposed, 'Swamiji, make me your disciple.'* "

To honor Śrīla Prabhupāda in his centennial year, we've marked one day for massive distribution of prasādam on a global scale. We call it "Feed the World Day." On that day, November 23, we're calling for every ISKCON temple, family, and congregational group to take part in giving out Kṛṣṇa's mercy in the form of prasādam, and in turn get the mercy of Śrīla Prabhupāda. We hope Feed the World Day will provide an inspirational springboard and encourage devotees to expand prasādam distribution unlimitedly.

World Enlightenment Day

One of the last events of the centennial year is World Enlightenment Day, December 14. On that day, devotees throughout the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement will focus on one goal: distributing as many books about Kṛṣṇa as they possibly can.

Many devotees distribute Kṛṣṇa conscious books as their main service. But on World Enlightenment Day, devotees who usually do all other sorts of service will join in the spirit of distributing books.

As Śrīla Prabhupāda repeatedly said, distributing Kṛṣṇa conscious books is like dropping bombs in the war against ignorance. Book distribution can check the rampant march of the degraded forces of this age.

Once while Śrīla Prabhupāda was on a layover at an airport in Japan, a young Japanese man approached him with serious spiritual questions. Śrīla Prabhupāda was pleased and amazed: He had never before visited Japan, but his books had reached there and were having an effect.

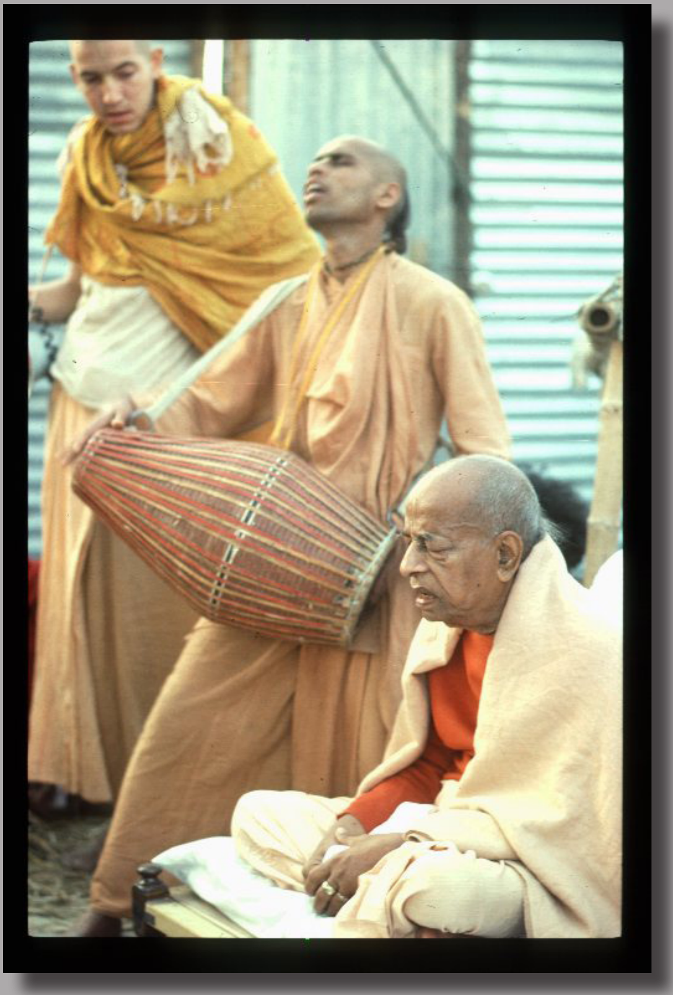
The Bhaktivedanta purports, which emanated from Śrīla Prabhupāda's lotus mouth, enlighten all who read them. Śrīla Prabhupāda is the true representative of Śrīla Vyāsadeva, the personification of knowledge. Anyone who wishes to do good to the world can step forward to distribute Śrīla Prabhupāda's books. Lord Kṛṣṇa says that no one is more dear to Him than one who preaches His glories. World Enlightenment Day gives us all an opportunity to go out armed with Śrīla Prabhupāda's books and shower them into the laps of faithful conditioned souls. Prabhupāda ordered us, "Distribute books, distribute books, distribute books."

Beyond the Centennial

Devotees throughout the world have this year tried in many ways to improve ISKCON and themselves. Now we must continue the work. As part of our Centennial observance, we focused on enhancing our purity in four ways: Education and Training, Uniting Prabhupāda's Family, Strengthening ISKCON, and Increasing Prabhupāda Consciousness. It's by carrying on these ideals that we can have the purity to expand book distribution, prasādam distribution, and the chanting of the holy names. We'll be able to spread the glories of Lord Kṛṣṇa and His pure devotees in every town and village of the world.

THANK YOU

This is the last Centennial bulletin. We'd like to thank the editors of Back to Godhead for offering us this forum. Thanks also to those who read the columns and felt inspired to take part in Centennial events. Ebe yaśa ghuśuk tribuvana: May Śrīla Prabhupāda's glories be spread throughout the three worlds!



Srila Prabhupad in Kumbh Mela 1977

HARE KRISHNA HARE KRISHNA

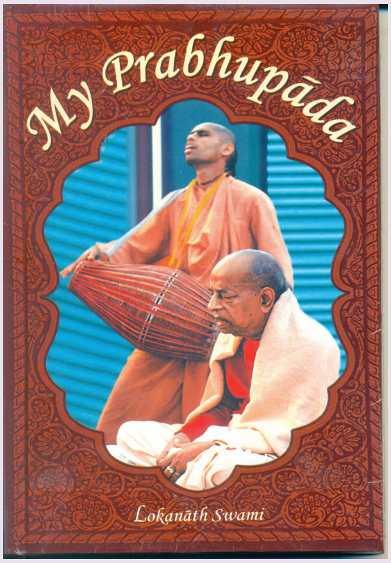
KRISHNA KRISHNA HARE HARE

HARE RAMA HARE RAMA

RAMA RAMA HARE HARE

OTHER BOOKS BY

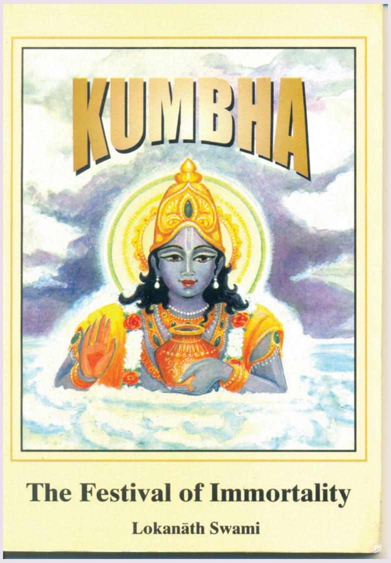
H.H. Lokanath Swami Maharaj


My Prabhupāda
Lokanāth Swami

MY PRABHUPADA
(English & Russian)

FESTIVALS
Lokanāth Swami
Śrīla Prabhupāda
at the Māyāpur-Vṛndāvana Festivals

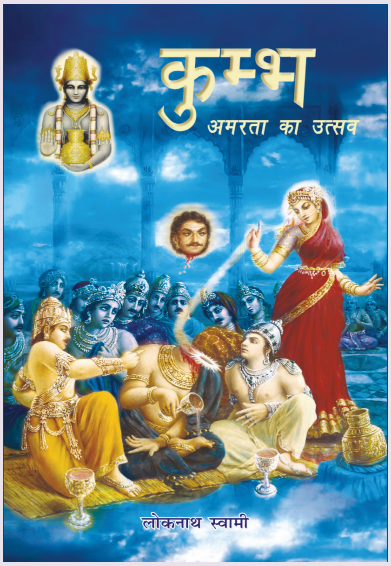
FESTIVALS


KUMBHA
The Festival of Immortality
Lokanāth Swami

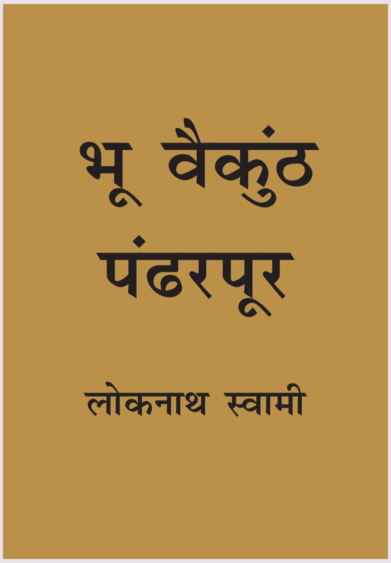
KUMBHA
The Festival of Immortality

सुखी जीवनाचा मार्ग
– निवडक प्रवचने –
प.पू. लोकनाथ स्वामी महाराज

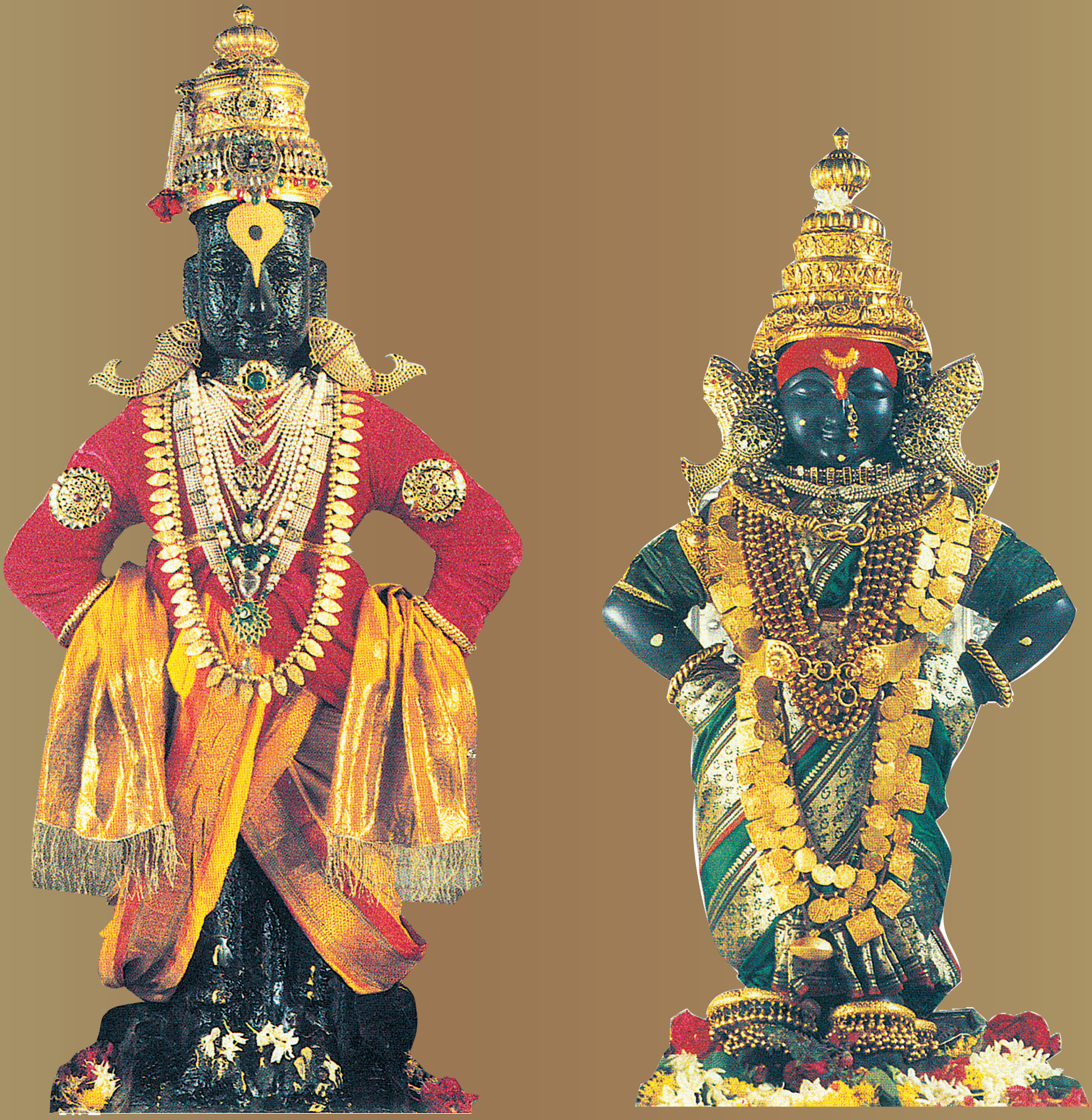
SUKHI JIVANACHA
MARGA (Marathi)


कुम्भ
अमरता का उत्सव
लोकनाथ स्वामी

KUMBHA (Hindi)


भू वैकुंठ
पंढरपूर
लोकनाथ स्वामी

BHU VAIKUNTHA
PANDHARPUR (Marathi)



Sri Sri Vitthal Rukmini